

SERMONS,

AND

PLANS OF SERMONS,

ON MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TEXTS OF

HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY THE LATE REV. JOSEPH BENSON.

Τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφόρησον.—2 Tim. iv. 5.

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SERMONS,
AND
PLANS OF SERMONS.

LXXI.

OFFENCES INEVITABLE AND EVIL.

MATTHEW XVIII. 7.

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

As our blessed Lord was the wisdom of God incarnate, so the Divine wisdom which appeared in all his discourses and actions, has been frequently noticed and celebrated. But there is one branch of it, which, although it was continually manifested, has seldom been observed, and that is, his saying and doing every thing at the most seasonable and proper time. Innumerable instances of this will occur to any one who reads the Gospel attentively with a view to observe it. The one which I shall now mention, has often struck me. As it was absolutely necessary in order to the salvation of mankind, that the Lord Jesus should expire as a malefactor upon a cross, and thereby expiate their sins; so he foresaw that, if this event should take

place, and his disciples have received no previous notice of it, it would prove a stumbling-block in their way, which they would not be able to surmount. He, therefore, saw it necessary to warn them of the sufferings that awaited him, before the period of those sufferings approached. And yet to have done this before they were fully convinced of his being the true and expected Messiah, or had any manifestations of the future and eternal glory which was prepared for him, and for those who should suffer on his behalf, would have been premature. Either they would not have believed such warnings, and therefore would not have profited by them, or they would have stumbled at them, just as much as at the sufferings themselves, and would have been deterred from persisting to follow him. We find, therefore, that he did not predict his crucifixion, till most of his disciples were fully satisfied of his being "the Christ, the Son of the living God." But as soon as Peter, in the name of them all, had made confession of that great and important truth, as we are informed in Matt. xvi. 13—21, "from that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." He seems, however, to have spoken but sparingly on this subject, till after he had given some of them a discovery of his glory, and of the glory of the future state, in his transfiguration on the mount. But after that glorious scene had been presented before them, after Moses and Elias had been introduced bearing witness to him, and discoursing with him "of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem," and a voice, proceeding

“from the excellent glory,” had said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, Hear ye him;”—after this, I say, “while they still abode in Galilee,” Jesus more fully and particularly informed them, “that the Son of man should be betrayed into the hands of men, and that they should kill him, and that the third day he should be raised again.” (Matt. xvii. 22, 23.) Thus did the Lord Jesus wisely time his discourses, revealing his truth, and declaring the mysteries of his kingdom to his disciples, as they were able to bear it.

But if the wisdom of our Lord is to be admired in selecting the fittest seasons for making those discoveries to his disciples, with which it concerned them to be acquainted, we must also admit that their folly was almost equally apparent in choosing the most unreasonable times they could, to display their own mistaken views concerning their Master’s kingdom, which indeed were improper to be discovered at all, but doubly so, in being grievously mistimed. Could it be supposed, that at the very time when Jesus was foretelling that he must be betrayed, condemned, put to death, and expire upon a cross, they should begin to contend for pre-eminence, and to aspire to the highest posts of honour in his kingdom; yet in the beginning of this chapter we are informed that “at the same time,” that is, at the time that Jesus had been predicting his sufferings, “came the disciples unto him, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

By “the kingdom of heaven,” they meant the kingdom which the God of heaven was about to set up, under the Messiah. This they still thought would be a temporal kingdom, and their question implied.

which of us shall obtain the chief dignity and preferment in thy kingdom? That this was their meaning appears evidently from the parallel passages in the other Evangelists; who inform us that a reasoning had arisen among them, (Luke ix. 46,) "which of them should be greatest:" and that when they came to Capernaum, "being in the house, he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace. For by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest." (Mark ix. 33, 34.)

Now the Lord Jesus, that he might convince them how little they understood the nature of his kingdom, and the means of acquiring the honours of it, called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children," except you be turned from such carnal and worldly views and desires, except you be inwardly changed, and made simple and humble, teachable, and dependent on your heavenly Father, innocent of ill, unassuming, and condescending to persons and things, which are reputed mean, being ready to serve all in love; so far from being greatest, or even great, in my kingdom, "ye shall not enter" into it. This is a doctrine, my brethren, which concerns us as much as it concerned them. May we be enabled to lay it to heart! "Whosoever, therefore," adds Jesus, "shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." He that has most humility, has most grace, and shall have most glory. "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend," shall cause to stumble and turn out of

the way, "one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." And then, on a foresight of the offences which would be given in future ages, and of the great harm that would be done by them to the best of causes, he exclaims in the words of our text, "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" A caution this, as Jerome has well observed, "particularly necessary for the disciples at this time, striving for superiority; for if they had continued in that spirit, they would have turned out of the way those they had gained to the faith."

But let us inquire,

I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND HERE BY "OFFENCES."

Offences, (*σκανδαλα*.) here mean *stumbling-blocks* in the way that leads to heaven. The expression, you will easily observe, is figurative. Christianity, or true religion, is considered as a path, or way; Christians are persons travelling in that way; and whatever occurs that tends to prevent men from beginning to walk in it, to turn them out of it, or to hinder them in pursuing it, is an offence or a stumbling-block. Thus, (Rom. xiv. 13,) "Let us judge this, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way;" and again, (ver. 21.) "It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Let me remark here, that offences may be taken, and not un-

frequently are so, when they are not given; persons stumble when, in reality, no stumbling-block is in the way, and there is nothing to stumble at. On the other hand, sometimes offences are given, when they are not taken. Stumbling-blocks are in the way, but those that are travelling therein, have judgement to discern them, and strength to step over them, and to proceed on their way, notwithstanding all obstacles.

Strictly speaking, stumbling-blocks are of three kinds.—They are such as God has laid in the way; which, however, are only stumbling-blocks to those whose minds are blind, and whose wills are perverse, and who are in a state of darkness and depravity, unenlightened, and unrenewed.—Or they are such as are laid in the way by the subtlety and malice of the Devil and his children.—Or, again, such as, through the devices of the grand adversary, are laid in the way by the inattention, folly, and misconduct of those who are, or profess to be the children of God. Let us consider each of these in order.

As to the stumbling-blocks laid in the way by God himself, Jesus Christ is, in this sense, a stumbling-block. Thus we read, (1 Pet. ii. 6, 8,) “It is contained in Scripture, Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious;—and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient;” or, more literally, “unto those who disbelieving,” or “disobeying the word, stumble,” “whereunto also,” that is, unto which stumbling, “they were appointed,” or, as the original, (*ερεθισαν*,) means, *placed, fitted, or disposed*; all who disbelieve, or disobey the word, being as much disposed, or fitted, to take offence, as a blind, or feeble person, is to stumble

at every object that lies in his way. To the same purpose speaks St. Paul, (Rom. ix. 31—33,) “Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law, for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence.” Our blessed Lord is a stumbling-block in different respects.—As God in his divine nature. Many stumble here; they cannot be persuaded that he is God, and because they find him evidently revealed as such in the Sacred Writings, they, therefore, reject the Scriptures themselves, and refuse to acknowledge their divine authority. But this is no more than was foretold by the evangelical Prophet Isaiah, (ch. viii. 13—15,) “Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel; for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken and be snared, and be taken.” It is added, “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples;” my disciples will receive my truth, and instead of stumbling at my divine nature, will make it their sanctuary.—As man in his human nature. “This child,” said old Simeon, (Luke ii. 34,) “is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.” His humiliation and meanness were stumbling-blocks to the Jews; (Matt. xiii. 57;) and also his exaltation and glory. (Matt. xxvi. 64, 65.) — — —

The doctrine of Christ offended them, as being too licentious; (Matt. xv. 12;) too strict; (Matt. xix. 22;) too simple; (1 Cor. i. 22, 23;) too mysterious; (John vi. 61, 62, 66.) His miracles were a cause of offence. "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" (Matt. xiii. 54.)

The cross of Christ was a stumbling-block; and that taken *literally*, for his death on the cross. (1 Cor. i. 23; Matt. xxvi. 31, 33; Luke xxiv. 21.) The Jews called Christ, in derision, "Tolve," the man that was hanged; and his disciples, "Abdee Tolve," the disciples of him that was hanged. Or, taken *figuratively*, for the sufferings endured by his members. (Matt. xiii. 21; xxiv. 10.) Their poverty, meanness, want of human learning, afflictions, persecutions, &c., are stumbling-blocks. These things certainly ought not to be causes of offence, but if rightly understood, as they are by the enlightened mind, are an occasion of joy and thanksgiving; yet, through the ignorance, prejudices, and perverseness of men, they are an offence without reason. — —

This leads me to mention, secondly, the stumbling-blocks laid in our way by Satan and his children, through God's permission; such are false doctrine, the introduction into the Church, of things or persons exciting strife and contention, divisions, parties, sects; (Rom. xvi. 17, 18;) threatenings, ill usage, reproaches, mockings, spoiling of goods, imprisonment, and even death from persecuting foes. All these, and similar things, are contrived, and brought about, by the malice of the great enemy, not only to afflict those whom he cannot destroy, but to prevent many from attempting the christian life, by deterring them with the difficul-

ties which they must encounter, or to turn many out of the way, and to hinder many from making progress in it. — —

Sometimes the professors of religion furnish their adversaries with a pretence for an improper treatment of them, by their folly, weakness, or misconduct. This is the third and worst kind of stumbling blocks.—Occasion is taken against them from their *folly*; when they speak and act unwisely, and expose themselves to ridicule.—From their *weakness*; when they are irresolute, unsteady, easily affrighted, or drawn aside from their duty.—From their *misconduct*; from the want of sobriety, when guilty of intemperance, excess, uncleanness; from the want of righteousness when guilty of injustice, over-reaching, oppressing, extorting, unfair dealing, undue selfishness; contracting debts, and not endeavouring to repay them; failure in business, through extravagance and culpable neglect; from the want of veracity or punctuality, not attending strictly to truth and engagement; from unmercifulness, when they do not forgive those who injure them, but seek revenge, and do not exercise pity, compassion and liberality; from pride, as manifested in dress, furniture, equipage, &c., living above their income; from a contentious disposition, striving who shall be the greatest, or falling out about little things; and from covetousness, manifested in a desire to accumulate for themselves, in withholding what should be allowed to dependants, and affording little, when capable of giving much, to charitable purposes; from want of godliness, as neglecting private, or family, prayer, and other means of grace. — —

Sometimes they give offence to one another by the undue liberties they take; by evil speaking, or by the unlawful use of lawful things, which may be done presumptuously, or negligently. (See Rom. xiv. 21; 1 Cor. viii. 7, 9.)

II. HOW IT APPEARS THAT IT MUST NEEDS BE THAT OFFENCES COME.

Offences of the kind first mentioned must come. CHRIST, his doctrine, and his cross, must be what they are, and "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in him." (Matt. xi. 6.) But these are only stumbling-blocks in our apprehension. So far from being bars and obstacles to us in our way, they are the doors whereby we enter on the road, and staves of support, whereby we are enabled to walk in it. They that stumble at these, stumble at their own mercies and salvation.

Offences of the second kind will come, not, strictly speaking, of necessity, but in the nature of things. For the Devil and his children will hate the children of God, and persecute them as far, and as often, as they are permitted. And God will permit them to go a certain length, to manifest their own wickedness, for the trial and purification of his people, and "that they which are approved may be made manifest." (Zech. iii. 2; 1 Cor. xi. 19.) "Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things." (Acts xx. 30.) We must be "in perils among false brethren." (2 Cor. xi. 26.) They will, therefore, though not ordained to it, use every means in their power to turn the people of God out of the way, or to impede their progress in it, or to

make them go on heavily and uncomfortably, as well as to prevent the people of the world from setting out.

Offences of the last kind will also come, as appears from the text, and from Luke xvii. 1, where the Greek word, (ἀνευδέκτον,) imports, *it is not* TO BE EXPECTED,* but that they should come through the strength of temptation, the subtlety and power of the Devil, and the remaining corruption of the human heart; through the allurements of the world, the deceitfulness of sin, and the weakness of human nature, unless God, by a constant miracle, should prevent it, which it would not become him to do.—He does not appoint or ordain these offences. He does not withhold the grace whereby they may be avoided. But he permits; or does not absolutely hinder them. — —

III. WHY OUR LORD PRONOUNCES A “WOE” UPON THE WORLD BECAUSE OF OFFENCES, AND UPON THAT MAN BY WHOM THE OFFENCE COMETH.

“Woe to the world.”

By “the world,” may be here meant, those that know not, and love not, God. (John xv. 18, 19; xvii. 9, 14; 1 John v. 19.) Through offences, especially those of the last mentioned kind, many of these perish eternally. Either they are prejudiced against the ways of God, and prevented from entering on them, or, having commenced a christian course, they are prevented from holding on. Hence they fall short of heaven, which they otherwise might have obtained; and they fall into

The expression, ἀνευδέκτον, however, as the word, ἀδύνατον, in the text, may be properly rendered *impossible*. Schleusner renders the verse in Luke, “Non contingit ut scandala non perpetrentur.”

hell, which they might have escaped. Therefore, woe to them! Miserable are they, and miserable shall they be to all eternity! They dishonour God, obstruct and injure others, and lose their own souls.

“The world,” may mean mankind in general, including even the people of God. It is true, many of mankind are improved, and gain everlasting good, in part, by offences. They become more humble, sensible of their own weakness, self-diffident, watchful, circumspect, and they are purified from the love of the world and sin. But this is not the case with all. Many are burdened, weighed down, distressed, and are hindered from making so much progress in the heavenly way; from getting, or doing, so much good on earth, or attaining so much happiness in heaven.

“Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.” For by laying stumbling-blocks in the way of others, he dishonours God in a manner none else do, or can do.—He does the work of the Devil, and pleases him; the work which the Devil would not do of himself.—He confirms the wicked in their prejudices against the word and work, the ways and people of God, and in their sins, and thereby prevents their conversion and salvation, and promotes their damnation.—He causes many righteous to backslide.—He hinders others from going forward in holiness.—He grieves and burdens those that hold on in the good way.—But “he that thus troubles them shall bear his own burden.” — —

All this mischief will be required at his hands with the blood of the souls he has murdered. Therefore, “woe” to such characters!

The meanest Saint, &c. must not be despised. 17

APPLICATION.

See that you offend not. (Ver. 6.) — —

See that you be not offended yourself. (Ver. 8, 9.) —

LXXII.

THE MEANEST SAINT, OR THE GREATEST
SINNER, SHOULD NOT BE DESPISED.

MATTHEW XVIII. 10—14.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

MANY passages in the Gospel history, and indeed in other parts of the Scripture, seem to have been recorded, chiefly with a view to show us what is in man by nature, and what remains in him after he is, in a measure, renewed by grace, while that divine principle, which is designed to produce the most glorious effects.

is opposed and counteracted in its operations by "the flesh lusting against the Spirit," and the carnal mind is not yet entirely subdued. Among these passages, the paragraph from whence I take my text is not one of the least remarkable. How are we struck with the mixture of ignorance and pride, of selfishness and ambition, which appeared on this occasion, in those disciples of our Lord, who had now been with him almost three years! At a time when Jesus had just begun to open to them a new scene, a scene of which they before had no conception; when he had begun to show them that "he must go up unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day;" (ch. xvi. 21;) nay, after he had just repeated his declarations on that head, and had assured them that "the Son of Man should be betrayed into the hands of men, and be killed, and rise again on the third day," (ch. xvii. 22, 23,) they begun to dispute one with another "which of them should be the greatest!" So little did they understand or believe their Lord's predictions, or so little were they affected by them; their own exaltation, and the gratification of their carnal and earthly desires, being what they chiefly regarded!

To counteract and shame them out of this "reasoning, which arose among them," (Luke ix. 46,) when they were come into Capernaum, and were in the house, (Mark ix. 33,) Jesus "asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?" but as "they held their peace," "he sat down and called the twelve, and said unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." (Ver. 35.) To explain this, we should observe, that

the twelve disciples, supposing like the other Jews, that the kingdom of the Messiah would be temporal, in which they would have rule over all other nations, and wealth would flow in upon them in greatest plenty, naturally thought, from their intimacy with Jesus, they would be preferred before other Jews; would be advanced to higher posts of honour, and have greater affluence of outward blessings; and since the king Messiah must have some officers of the highest rank, they concluded that these would be chosen from among themselves; although they could not agree which of them were the most fit for such exalted dignities. Now, as our Saviour's kingdom was not of this world, and, therefore, nothing of this kind was to be expected, but rather that his followers should suffer the loss of all things, and lie under the greatest infamy amongst men, Christ plainly tells them that these carnal inclinations and desires, and these worldly and ambitious views and expectations, were perfectly inconsistent with their being members of that spiritual kingdom which he was to erect. To do this still more effectually, he "called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them," that they might consider him attentively, and learn by the sweetness, docility, and modesty visible in his countenance, what the temper and dispositions of his disciples ought to be, and how indifferent they should be to the things of time and sense. This method of instruction was agreeable to the manner of the Eastern Doctors, and Prophets, who, in teaching, impressed the minds of their disciples by symbolical actions, as well as by words. Thus (John xx. 22,) Jesus, by "breathing" on his Apostles, signified that through the invisible energy of his power, he conferred on them

the gift of his Spirit. “And Jesus said, Verily I say unto you;” I solemnly assure you of this, as a truth which you ought not only to believe, but seriously to lay to heart, “Except ye be converted,” or turn from these worldly and carnal views and desires, “and become like little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The first step towards entering into the kingdom of grace, is to “become as little children;” lowly in heart, sensible of our ignorance and helplessness, and wholly dependent on our Father who is in heaven, for a supply of all our wants. “Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven;” he that has the greatest measure of humility, joined with the sister graces of resignation, patience, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering; who is therefore satisfied with the place, station, and office, which God assigns him, whatever it may be, and meekly submits to all the divine directions, though contrary to his own inclinations, and prefers others in honour to himself,—such a person is really great in the kingdom of heaven, or of God.

“And when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,” (Mark ix. 36,) “Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name,” whosoever shall discover an affectionate regard to any one of my humble and lowly followers, “receiveth me;” I shall esteem the kindness as done to myself; “but whoso shall offend one of these little ones;” shall turn them out of the right way, or hinder them proceeding in it: the original expression is, whosoever shall *cause to stumble one of these little ones*; “it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were

drowned in the depth of the sea.” The consequences he shall suffer, unless prevented by a sincere repentance, are more dreadful than the most terrible punishment which could be inflicted by earthly powers, as the being cast, with a large millstone tied round the neck, into the sea.* “Woe unto the world because of offences;” unspeakable misery shall arise through them; “for it must needs be that offences come;” such is the nature of things, and such the weakness, folly, and wickedness of mankind, that it cannot be but they will come; “but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.” Offences are all things which obstruct us in the way of righteousness, or are an occasion of our falling. “Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off; if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out,” &c. Let not the most dear enjoyment, or the most beloved and useful person, turn thee out of the way, or hinder thee in it.

Then follow the words of the text, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” Be careful to receive, and not to offend, the least and weakest of those who profess to be my disciples; for inconsiderable as some of these may appear to you, the very angels, not excepting those of the highest order, who continually appear before the throne of the Most High, have

* Casaubon, Elsner, and others, have shown at large, that drowning in the sea was a punishment used among the ancients, and that the persons condemned had sometimes heavy stones tied about their necks, or were rolled up in sheets of lead. The term, *μυλος ονικος*, rendered *millstone*, properly signifies one too large to be turned, as some were, by the hand, and requiring the force of asses to move it.—See the Author’s Commentary.

a special charge over them, and do not disdain, on proper occasions, to perform services of protection and kindness for the meanest Christian. As all the angels are ministering spirits, sent forth, occasionally at least, to “minister to the heirs of salvation,” they may, in general, be properly called, “their angels.” The expression, they “behold the face of my Father,” alludes to the custom of earthly courts, where the great men, and those who are highest in office and favour, are most frequently in the prince’s palace and presence, and constantly converse with him. (See 1 Kings x. 8.)

It seems to signify the perfect knowledge the angels have of God, their intimacy with him, and their continual attendance on him, to do his pleasure. Thus Gabriel said, “I am Gabriel, (ὁ παρῆσθης ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ,) that stand in the presence of God.” (Luke i. 19.)

But if the chief of the angels consider it no degradation of their dignity to be employed in taking care of the most humble and despised Christians, how strong and beautiful is the reasoning of our Lord, when, on this account, he cautions us against despising them! But as a much stronger reason to enforce the exhortation, our Lord adds, that he himself, “the Son of Man,” who is also “the Son of God,” came into the world “to save” them, when they were “lost,” and doubtless, he will require it, at our hands, if we injure any of them, or obstruct them in the way of salvation.

Jesus further illustrates the subject, by a parable taken from the conduct of a faithful shepherd. “How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and [but] one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the

ninety and nine," in their pasture, "and goeth into the mountains, and," with the most solicitous care, "seeketh that which is gone astray;" apparently discovering more anxiety for the lost sheep, than for all the rest; "and if so be that he find it, he rejoiceth more of that sheep," which was in such danger of being utterly lost, "than of the ninety and nine which went not astray." By this illustration does our Lord display the unspeakable love of God to the souls of men, who, having departed from God, are liable to be destroyed by Satan, and perish eternally. He therefore adds, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." He loves them more than the most compassionate shepherd does his sheep, and therefore takes infinitely greater care, to recover, preserve, and save them. Let those, therefore, who know these things, "be workers together with God," rejoice at the first indications of true repentance in a sinner. Let them imitate the example of *the angels, of the Son of God, and of their Father which is in heaven*, in not despising or hindering the meanest person in his spiritual course, but rather helping forward, and promoting, by every means, his present and everlasting salvation.

Let us contemplate more particularly,

I. THE STATE IN WHICH ALL MANKIND, EVEN CHILDREN, AND SUCH AS ARE NOW CHRIST'S DISCIPLES, ARE BY NATURE.

They are "lost."

Man is naturally stript of his original dignity and glory, of the favour, image, and fellowship of God, and

turned out of paradise, where he enjoyed, without care or toil, all conveniences and delights both for the body and mind.—

He is lost in the darkness of ignorance; he knows not what, or where, or whence, he is, or whither he is going; he knows not what is his chief business or greatest happiness in this world.

He is lost in this wilderness. There are many ways, with respect to faith and practice, which seem to lead to happiness, and he knows not which to take; Christ, the true and only way, is not known nor followed by him. — —

He is lost through spiritual wants, as of food, raiment, dwelling; being destitute of the bread of life, the robe of righteousness, the habitation of the Divine name, a strong tower and place of protection. — —

He is lost through guilt. The case may be described by a familiar expression, as if a man should say, “My son has stolen, robbed; he is lost.” — —

He is lost through a variety of deadly distempers, as by fever, dropsy, consumption; through blindness, deafness, lameness. — —

He is lost to God, as a piece of silver might be to its owner, or a sheep to its shepherd, or as a prodigal son to a father. — —

To use another figure, he is ready to be shipwrecked and lost, like a vessel on the stormy ocean, about to be dashed on the rock of death, and plunged into the sea of divine wrath. — —

Nevertheless.

II. WE MUST NOT DESPISE THIS LOST CREATURE,

whether child or man; not even the most abandoned sinner, but must “honour all men.” (1 Pet. ii. 17.)

For being the offspring of God, in a sense in which the inferior creatures are not, being possessed of bodies more “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and of rational and immortal spirits, notwithstanding their natural condition, men are capable of possessing God’s peculiar favour, his image, and communion with him; of being acknowledged and treated as his children, as brethren and sisters of Christ, joint heirs with him; of being made the peculiar care of the “angels who always behold the face of their Father;” nay, of being as the angels, as Christ himself, and of being with him for ever and ever.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save them. This shows the value he puts upon this lost creature. Reflect on the dignity of his person. He was the Son of God, his only begotten; the Word, the Creator, and upholder of all things; God, Jehovah. (Heb. i. 1, 2.)—Think on the manner of his coming, the glory he left, (Phil. ii. 5—8,) the infirmity, poverty, infamy, to which he submitted. (John i. 14; Rom. viii. 3.)—The Son of God came freely, that, being our kinsman, he might be our Redeemer; (Heb. ii. 14;) restoring to us, our lost inheritance, Paradise; our lost blessings, as the divine favour, image, and communion with God; our lost persons, souls, and bodies—That he might enlighten us, lost in darkness, by his doctrine; confirmed by his miracles, prophecies, and sufferings—That he might make himself our way, as our Mediator, and example, and guide, by his word and Spirit—That he might

expiate our guilt, by his death—That he might provide spiritual food, and clothing, a habitation, and supply all our wants by his body, and blood, his word, Spirit, and ordinances—That he might heal our disorders, by his stripes, sufferings, grace, providences, chastisements—That he might thus restore us to God, and his people, as pieces of valuable money may be found, restamped, and sent again into circulation, the lost sheep brought home, the prodigal returned—That he might sink the rock of death into a plain, “swallowing it up in victory,” or making it an open gate of life—That, instead of our falling into an ocean of fire and brimstone, he might bring us into a sea of infinite felicity.

It is not the will of our Father “that one of these little ones should perish.” Though the Son came voluntarily, yet not of himself, but “the Father sent him,” and that out of love; (John iii. 16, 17;) sent him “in the likeness of sinful flesh;” (Rom. viii. 3;) “sent forth his Son made of a woman;” (Gal. iv. 4;) subject to all the infirmities and sorrows of human nature, so that he “grew up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form nor comeliness;” moreover, God “laid on him the iniquities of us all;” he “wounded him for our transgressions;” he “made his soul an offering for sin;” he “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,” (Rom. viii. 32,) so that “by the grace of God,” Jesus Christ “tasted death for every man;” and unquestionable proof, surely, that it is not the will of God that any should perish.—But as we cannot but perish, notwithstanding what Christ hath done and suffered for us, unless we are made sensible of, and humbled for, our lost estate by nature; unless

we know Christ as a Saviour, come to him, and believe in him for salvation, receive and obey him; in order to this he hath given his Gospel to be preached to every creature, as the mean of discovering to us our lost estate, of revealing Christ, and to be a seed of repentance and faith, of regeneration and life to our souls.— Again, to awaken our attention to this Gospel, and lay a firm foundation for faith in it, he gave his Spirit in signs, wonders, and miracles; and, to generate faith in our hearts, he gives the same Spirit, in his enlightening, awakening, quickening, renewing influences.

In his providence, he hath, in every age, exercised great goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering towards sinners, that he might lead them to repentance; he hath called them by various ways, by judgments and blessings; that they might come to Christ, he hath readily pardoned, accepted, and saved them, when they came; he hath endured with much long-suffering, such as, refusing, neglecting, or delaying to come, have made themselves “vessels of wrath,” who think themselves “whole, and have no need of a physician;” uncondemned, and neither want pardon, nor reprieve; not lost, and, therefore, need not saving help; who say “they see, and their sin remains;” (John ix. 41;) who suppose they are not particularly guilty, not having been great sinners; who know their way; to whom their duty, endeavours, baptism, church, and sacrament, are their Christ; morality, their new-birth; self righteousness, their dress; who slight Christ and his remedies, or receive them in mere notion. But—

III. WHEN, OR IN WHAT CASE, MAY IT BE PROPERLY SAID, THAT WE DESPISE THOSE THAT WERE LOST, OR NOT BEING YET FOUND, AND SAVED BY CHRIST, ARE STILL IN THEIR NATURAL STATE.

—When we are not sensible of, or do not duly consider their immense value, on account of their common, human, rational, and immortal nature; but, rather, regard persons on account of what is extraneous thereto, as wealth, honour, learning, genius, youth, beauty, or exterior accomplishments.

—When we do not consider that, though naturally fallen and lost, they are mercifully regarded by God the Father, who hath given his Son for them.—That they are redeemed by the blood of Christ, who left his glory, and gave himself, his *all* for them, and suffered, died, and rose again on their behalf.—That they are visited by the Spirit of God, and have been favoured with his Gospel; sanctioned by the accomplishment of prophecies, the fulfilment of types, the working of miracles; sealed by the blood, and confirmed by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.—That they are watched over by a Divine Providence, blessed with many temporal mercies, as well as means of grace, and chastened and corrected by many judgments; their impenitence and disobedience being borne with much patience and long-suffering.—That they all may, doubtless many of them will, be the people and children of God, and as such, shall be exalted above the greatest potentates on earth, and become our companions in unutterable and eternal bliss.

—We certainly despise them when we take less pains to save them, than to find a piece of lost gold or

silver, or to recover a lost sheep, or reclaim a prodigal son.

—When we do not use every mean in our power to bring them to God, such as making the Scriptures, in general, and the Gospel in particular, known to them, which is intended to be the means of repentance, and the object and seed of faith; do not instruct children, and labour to bring them to him who says, “Suffer little children to come to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;” do not direct them to pray, and pray with and for them and others, that they may receive the Holy Spirit.

—When we do not readily comfort, and entertain such as are brought to God, but keep them at a distance. This our Lord had in view when he said, “Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name receiveth me;” (Mark ix. 37;) or, “Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me.” (Luke ix. 48.)

—When we are not careful to shun and guard against every thing calculated to offend or cause any to stumble; prevent them from entering in the ways of God, or make them to turn aside, or hinder them therein; thus “destroying those for whom Christ died,” (Rom. xiv. 15,) and causing “a weak brother to perish.” (1 Cor. viii. 11.)

—When we do not consider one another, to watch over and “provoke one another to love and to good works;” endeavouring to help forward all such, whether young or old, that are brought to God.—

GENERAL APPLICATION.

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LXXIII.

AN EXPOSTULATION WITH THOSE THAT
NEGLECT THE WORK OF THE LORD.

MATTHEW XX. 6.

Why stand ye here all the day idle?

THE case of the rich young man, who turned away from Christ on account of his love of worldly possessions, gave occasion to our Lord to observe, that many who, like that young man, “are first,” in outward advantages, and in appearances of piety and virtue, should “be last” in the esteem of God, and be found most wanting in the day of judgment; and that “the last,” according to human opinion, and who are rejected by such as judge according to outward appearances, “shall be first,” or the highest in the divine favour, in that day; or, as the words of our Lord may mean, that many of those who were first called, whether Jews or Gentiles, into the kingdom of God, declining in their zeal and piety, shall fall short of those who are called at a later period, and be lowest in their future reward, though perhaps both may be finally saved. (ch. xix. 30.) In illustration of the same doctrine, our Lord delivered the Parable of the Householder, recorded in this chapter, wherein he represents the proceedings of God in his kingdom, under the figure of a “householder, who went out,” at different periods of the day, “to hire labourers into his vineyard.”

First, "he went early in the morning," or, about six o'clock, called by the Romans and Jews, the first hour, when he engaged some, at the usual price of a day's labour, (a Roman penny, equal to about seven pence and a half penny of our money;) then, about the third, our ninth hour, when, finding others unemployed, he engaged them, on a promise that they should receive whatsoever was right. "Again, he went out about the sixth and ninth hour," or, as we reckon, at noon, and at three in the afternoon, "and did likewise." Finally, "about the eleventh hour, he went out," or, five o'clock in the afternoon, when there was but one hour remaining before sunset, and "finding others standing idle," he expostulated with them in the words of my text. These also, he sends into the vineyard, on the same general assurance of giving them what was just and reasonable.

The different hours, at which the householder is represented as hiring the labourers, if we apply the parable to the case of the Jews, may refer to the successive periods at which he invited that people into his spiritual Church, by his servants the Prophets, by John the Baptist, by Christ, and his Apostles. But if the parable be more generally applied, as it was probably intended to be, we may consider the different hours, as referring to the several periods of human life, as that of childhood, youth, middle age, the decline of life, and old age. Thus some, like Samuel and Josiah, are called into the service of God in their earliest days. Others are led to forsake the paths of folly and sin, and to "remember their Creator in the days of their youth." Many, again, are not induced to obey the call of the Gospel, till they attain to manhood, and advanced age,

and have to bless God that he then makes them “willing in the day of his power.” Finally, some, having spent almost all their days in vanity and sin, are not brought into the vineyard till near the close of their life, but then, through the mercy and grace of God, are enabled to manifest the fruits of a true repentance, and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus. All, however, who really obey the call of God’s Messengers, and diligently labour in his spiritual vineyard, whether for a shorter or longer period, will undoubtedly obtain eternal life; not indeed as the wages due to their work, but as “the gift of God.” (Rom. vi. 23; and xi. 6.) Though several Scriptures certainly inform us, that the future recompense will be in proportion to our work, (see 1 Cor. iii. 8; and 2 Cor. v. 10,) yet, according to the import of the parable, God shall in the end, without injustice or partiality, bestow the same gracious reward on many that were called to his service later in life, and on others who engaged therein much earlier; and the decisions of the great day of judgment will, in many instances, be different to our expectations, though they will demonstrate to the admiration of his servants, and the entire confusion of the ungodly, that the “Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.”

Without entering further into the consideration of the parable at large, we shall endeavour to improve and apply the expostulation of the Householder, with those whom he found unemployed in the market place, at the eleventh hour; and show,

I. WHO THEY ARE THAT MAY BE SAID TO STAND ALL THE DAY IDLE.

They stand idle who, however busy they may be as to this life, in pursuing pleasure, in seeking honour, in laying up money, or even in providing for their families, yet do nothing for the life to come. Such persons are comparatively idle,—because this life is insignificant, referring only to the body and the present world; but the other life is important, referring to the soul, and the world to come;—because this life is uncertain, a mere vapour, a shadow; the other life is solid, fixed, unchangeable;—because this life is short and but for a moment, and the other life is for ever;—because they do not answer the end of their creation, and do not the business they were sent into the world to perform. —

They stand idle who do not furnish their minds with divine and saving knowledge, especially respecting themselves, God, the Mediator, the way of salvation, their duty and happiness;—who do not enrich their hearts with grace, have not repentance, faith, love, are not justified and sanctified, which would ensure their happiness in the life to come;—who do not adorn their lives with good works, and thereby give evidence of their repentance, (Luke iii. 7—14,) of their faith, (Gal. v. 6; James ii. 24—26,) of their love, (John xiv. 21; 1 John v. 3; iii. 16—21;) this would be putting out their money to good interest, and increasing their eternal reward;—who do not use the means in order to the practice of good works, industry, frugality, and self-denial.

They stand idle who do not lay themselves out to advance the glory of God, by endeavouring to bring

men to know, love, fear, and serve him, by relieving their wants, and by every other labour of love, “bearing much fruit,” whereby God is glorified. (Mat. v. 16; John xv. 8.) — —

They stand idle who do not labour for the good of their fellow-creatures in soul and body. (Matt. xxv. 35—40; 1 Cor. xv. ult; Gal. vi. 9, 10; Heb. xiii. 16.) In other words, who do not enter the Gospel vineyard;—but how do we enter in? by Christ the door;—who, having entered, do not work in it.

Some stand thus “all the day idle;” the whole day of life. Is not this the case with many of you? — — —

II. WHY THEY DO SO.

“*Why* stand ye idle?” Is it because you have no work to do? Have you no mind to get enlightened? or is it enlightened already? Do you know your nature, your origin, and end? Are you acquainted with God, the Mediator, the plan of salvation, your obligations, duty, and happiness? Have you no heart to get renewed, or is it renewed already? Have you no soul to save? Surely you have. Is it then saved already? No: by no means. Have you no God to glorify? or do you think you have glorified him enough? Have you no fellow-creatures to benefit? Are none ignorant, and want information? None wicked, and want reclaiming? None naked, and want clothing? — —

Why stand ye *here* idle?—upon earth, a stage for action, a field intended for labour, a field of battle for fighting against the enemies of your souls?—*Here* in the vineyard!—among professors of Christianity?—If ye

will stand idle, go out of the vineyard; give up the profession of Christianity rather than to dishonour it. —

Why stand *ye* idle? ye rational and immortal creatures, members of the visible Church? Ye, who are favoured with the light of the Gospel? Ye Protestants, reformed from the superstitions of Popery? Ye who have been born and brought up in this enlightened land, and in this enlightened age? Ye Churchmen, or members of whatever christian society? Ye that have, or may have, companions to walk and work with? — —

Why *stand* ye idle? Ye stand as if you meant to work. You say, “I go Sir,” and yet you do not go. — —

Why stand ye *all the day* idle?

Is the work required to be done, needless and vain? Is it unreasonable and difficult? Is it unclean and defiling? Quite the reverse. — —

Is the Master self-appointed and assuming, and one who has no right to your services? Is he false and perfidious, and one who will not reward you for them? or hard and austere, and whom it is difficult to please?

Are the wages uncertain, or worthless, or transitory? Quite the contrary. — —

Objection 1. “And they said, No man hath hired us?” True. But why is this the case? Is it not because you would not be hired. You loved not the Master, but preferred Belial; you loved not the work, but preferred sin; you loved not the wages, but preferred hell. Let me hire you now. What shall my Master give you? Will an estate, a crown, a kingdom, content you? Yea, a heavenly inheritance, an immortal crown, a kingdom that cannot be moved? He will even make you a son, an heir, an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ.

Objection 2. But we are not idle; we are very busy providing for our families. True. Still if you do not the work which has been mentioned, you will find, when on a sick bed, when on a death bed, and above all, when standing before the judgment-seat of Christ, that you have been idle indeed, that you have been doing what yielded no profit, “walking in a vain shadow, and disquieting yourselves in vain,” while you have neglected the business you were sent into the world to perform, and the only business which would have yielded solid, satisfactory, and enduring fruit.

LXXIV.

THE MAKING LIGHT OF THE MARRIAGE-FEAST.

MATTHEW XXII. 5.

But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.

As the time drew near when JESUS should finish his testimony, seal it with his blood, and confirm it with his resurrection, he became more clear, explicit, and pointed in his doctrine, in his reproofs of the chief priests and elders of the Jews, and in his predictions of the calamities which should come upon their nation. Still, however, that he might give them as little offence as possible, and might convey his instructions in that way in which they were most likely to be received and remembered, to produce the deepest impression, and the

most lasting effect,—he spoke by parables. Thus, when they demanded of him, as he was teaching in the temple, “by what authority he did these things, and who gave him that authority,” (ch. xxi. 23,) after wisely demanding of them, in his turn, from whence the baptism of John was, he exposes their infidelity and impenitence by the repentance of the publicans, illustrated in the Parable of the Two Sons, (ver. 28—32,) and then he foretells the dreadful doom of the Jewish Church, for its unfruitfulness under the greatest advantages, in the parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, wherein he makes them, before they were aware, pass sentence upon themselves; confirming that sentence by the words of their favorite Prophet David, (ver. 33—46.)

The Parable of the Marriage-feast, from whence I take my text, is closely connected with that of the Vineyard; in which our Lord continues to vindicate God’s mercy and justice in the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, admonishing the latter also of the necessity of holiness, remaining destitute of which, they would meet with the same severity of judgment as had befallen the disobedient Jews.

This parable illustrates “the kingdom of heaven,” or the dispensation of the Gospel, by the case of a King, “who made a marriage for his son.” Our Lord is often in Scripture represented under the character of a bridegroom, and the marriage-feast is intended to signify the blessings of his Gospel, which are set forth under the emblem of a feast, in several other passages, (Isai. xxv. 6; lv. 1, 2; Luke xiv. 16.) John the Baptist, the twelve, and the seventy disciples, were “sent forth,” while our Lord was on earth, as the King’s servants, to “call them that were bidden,” (τους κεκλημενους) *that*

had been before invited, as the Jews had been from the times of Moses, to which people the first offers of grace and salvation through Christ were made; but, though invited long before, and called by these messengers in our Lord's life-time, "they would not come;" they were so rude and foolish as to refuse the invitation to the nuptial banquet of that Messiah they had so long expected; who was also "the Desire of all nations." "Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come to the marriage." After Christ's resurrection and ascension, the Apostles were sent forth to inform the Jews, that the divine mission of Christ was confirmed by his resurrection; that sin was expiated by his death, and justification, peace with God, and the influences of his Spirit, and all other blessings of the Gospel, procured for all who would accept them in the way of repentance, faith, and new obedience. "But they made light of it;" of the invitation, and of the feast itself, "and went their ways, one to his farm and another to his merchandise;" they had other things to mind, in which they took more delight, and which they thought more concerned them. "And the remnant;" those who were neither husbandmen nor tradesmen, but ecclesiastics, *viz.* the Scribes and Pharisees, and chief Priests; "took" (*κρατησαντες*) *laying hold on*, "his servants, entreated them spitefully," or rather *shamefully*, "and slew them."

If it be objected that these circumstances of the parable are improbable, as it was never known in the world that subjects refused the invitation of their sovereign to the marriage of his son; and much less that

any were ever so rude and barbarous as to treat with ignominy, and slay the servants of a King, or any superior, who came to invite them to a feast; it must be observed that, allowing this to be so, it only places the crime of the Jews in a more aggravated point of view, with respect to whom all this was literally true. They whose feet should have been beautiful, because they brought glad tidings of peace and salvation, were treated "*as the effscouring of all things.*" (1 Cor. iv. 13.) The Prophets, and John the Baptist, had been thus abused already, and the Apostles and other first ministers of Christ, were to lay their account with being treated in the same manner. The Jews were, either directly or indirectly, agents in most of the persecutions of the first preachers of the Gospel. Witness the history of the Acts, and the writings of the Apostles.

The parable then represents the King, when he had heard of the treatment received by his servants, as exceedingly incensed. As "the invitation to the marriage-feast of his son, sent to his supposed friends, was the highest expression of his regard for them, and the greatest honour that could be done to them; therefore, when they refused it for such trifling reasons, and were so savagely ungrateful as to beat, and wound, and kill, the servants who had come with it, it was justly viewed as a most outrageous affront, an injury that deserved the severest punishment." Accordingly, "when the King heard thereof he was wroth, and sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up the city " A plain prediction this of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. "This clause," says Dr. Doddridge, "must be supposed to come in by way of prolepsis or anticipation, for there could not be time

before the feast, already prepared, was served up, to attempt an execution of this kind." "Then saith he to his servants, 'The wedding is ready;'" the marriage-feast is prepared; "but they which were bidden were not worthy;" they were not disposed to receive the Gospel, and behave kindly to the preachers of it. (Ch. x. 11—14) They slighted and despised the spiritual banquet, out of love to their secular interests, which he that does, Christ has signified, is not "worthy" of him, because he does not "take up his cross and follow him." (Ch. x. 37, 38.) Yet shall not the provisions I have made be lost,—"Go ye, therefore, into the highways," (διεξόδους τῶν ὁδῶν) the *by-ways*, or *turnings of the roads*; or, as others interpret it, *the places where several streets and roads meet*; "and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage." This was intended of the calling of the Gentiles, and is a universal and undistinguishing offer of the blessings and privileges of Christianity to them, whether high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, young or old; all, without exception, are welcome to Gospel privileges upon Gospel terms. "So those servants went out," as commanded, "and gathered as many as they found," whatever their character had formerly been. Thus the apostles, upon the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews, in obedience to Christ's command, went "into all" parts of "the world, and preached it to every creature," who was willing to hear it. "And the wedding was furnished with guests;" great multitudes being gathered into the Gospel Church; yea, of "such as should be finally saved."

The sequel of the parable, which I shall not explain particularly, inculcates the necessity of holiness in all who profess to embrace the gospel of Christ, in the

doom inflicted on the man who did not accept and put on the wedding garment, which it must be supposed the King provided for all the guests, according to the usage, in eastern countries, in magnificent entertainments. And it is a circumstance, as Calvin observes, “which well suits the method of God’s dealing with us, who indeed requires holiness, in order to our receiving the benefits of the Gospel; but is graciously pleased to work it in us by his Holy Spirit, and therefore may justly resent and punish our neglect of so great a favour.” We cannot doubt, that in the last judgment Christ will “command his angels to gather out of his kingdom, all things that offend, and them that do iniquity” and to cast them into the darkness of hell, as the King commanded the offending guest to be “bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness.”

From the words of the text we shall be led to consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THE BLESSING, OR BLESSINGS, WHICH WERE MADE LIGHT OF, AND IN WHAT SENSE, OR RESPECTS, THIS WAS DONE.

They made light of the marriage of God’s Son with his spouse the Church,—whereby she becomes *his* with all her poverty, and he becomes hers with all he is and hath,—whereby she is brought into the nearest possible relation to him. like that of a wife to a husband,—whereby she has the most intimate union and communion with him,—whereby she becomes his best beloved, even above angels, and his most peculiar care,—whereby she is secure of protection, direction, and a provision of all things necessary, or convenient, for her,—whereby she is constituted an associate or

partner with him of his inheritance, (and he is heir of all things,) of his unsearchable riches, crown, kingdom, and glory. — —

They made light of the marriage-feast; observed—In honour of this blessed union;—For the refreshment of the guests; a feast of truth and information for the understanding, of pardon and peace for the conscience, of love, hope, and joy, for the affections;—For their sustenance and nourishment, being intended to afford food for their souls, including “milk for babes,” and “stronger meat” for the more advanced in age, “feeding them with knowledge and understanding,” (Jer. iii. 15,) that “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ they might go on to perfection,” (Heb. v. 11—14; vi. 1;) feeding them with grace, to strengthen and support their graces and virtues, to advance them towards “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” and to make them “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

They made light of the honour, advantages, and happiness of being each one, in particular as well as collectively, in union with the Church, the spouse of the Lamb. — — —

They made light of all the invitations given them to partake of this feast, and this union:—By natural light; (John i. 9;) the general calls afforded through the medium of God’s works in creation; (Rom. i. 19, 20;) of reason, of conscience, of the dispensations of divine providence.—By God’s revealed will. They had Moses and the Prophets.—By his special Messengers, as Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, the twelve, the seventy disciples, who said, “All things are now ready; come unto the marriage.” Thus did they repeatedly

reject the invitation.—Moreover they were invited to this glorious union, and the feast in celebration of it, by the angels who announced the birth of Christ. (Luke ii. 13.)—By the King's Son himself coming in person, teaching; living, suffering, dying amongst them.—By God the Father, “calling them to his own eternal glory by Christ Jesus,” (1 Pet. v. 10,) and “bearing witness” to the preaching of the Apostles “with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost.” (Heb. ii. 3, 4.)

These are the things which they made light of, that is, which they viewed as unimportant,—which they were careless of and neglected,—to which they preferred their farms and merchandise,—which they prized so much, that the most trivial and unimportant things, such as going to see ground already bought, the proving oxen already purchased, the enjoyment of a wife already married, (Luke xiv. 18—20,) were alleged in excuse for neglecting to partake of them.* — —

These, I say, were the things which they rejected with such contempt,—and the messengers of which they persecuted, and put to death, — — But their conduct will appear more strange while we consider,

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS THAT MADE LIGHT OF THEM.

They were,—the members of God's visible Church, and professors of the true religion; professing not only to

* These circumstances from the Parable of the *Great Supper*, may be alluded to in a discourse on that of the *Marriage-feast*, since both the parables, though delivered on different occasions, were evidently spoken by our Lord with the same general intent.—E.

be his creatures, made and preserved by him, but his subjects, his servants, and children;—who had been entrusted for ages with his holy Oracles. which foretold the coming of the Messiah, described his character and office, his marriage with his Church, and the marriage-feast.—They professed to believe in these Oracles, and to expect, and desire, the coming of the Messiah.—They had been for many ages the objects of the Divine love and care, and the subjects of many wonderful deliverances wrought out for them. — — They had the house of God and the ordinances of divine worship among them, and even attended them continually.—They read, and prayed, and fasted, and had the whole form of godliness. — — They were even moral in their conduct, and charitable to the poor; and “touching the righteousness of the law,” many of them were “blameless.”—Nay, they had a great zeal for what they thought to be orthodoxy, as well as for the strict observance of the Sabbath; and all the rites and ceremonies of religion, and the usages of their country. — — Notwithstanding all this, we have to consider,

III. THE SIN, FOLLY, AND MISERABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR CONDUCT.

The sin of it.

It was great ingratitude to God, for the honour, riches, and happiness, included in the offer of making them the spouse of his Son; for the expense in providing so rich a feast; for the honour done them, and the pains taken to send them so many repeated invitations, by such persons, and with such apparatus, and displays

of love, and power, and glory.—It was disobedience to God, as their master and owner, who had a property in them, and authority over them, by right of creation, preservation, and redemption.—It was rebellion against him as their King.—It was hypocrisy before him as a God omnipresent, omniscient, who searcheth the heart, amidst so much profession, and form, and external show, to be such enemies to Christ and his Gospel in their hearts.—It was an affront put upon him, his Son, and his servants, and an insult offered to him; as it would be to a King, if he were to invite a subject of low birth, and mean rank, to his palace, and to a splendid entertainment, and he should assign a trivial reason for declining to comply with the invitation.—

The folly of it.

By this conduct they deprived themselves of the honour and happiness of being “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”—Of the pleasure and improvement which would have been derived from such society.—Of the refreshment from so rich and costly a provision. — —

The miserable consequences of it.

Continuing to make light of these things they would perish for want of the heavenly food.—Not being married to God’s Son, and, therefore, not being God’s children, nor of his household, though in his house, or church here, they could not abide for ever; but must be “cast into outer darkness,” and abandoned of God. They must be punished for their ingratitude and disobedience. (Luke xiv. 21.) In the destruction of their city and nation, by the Romans, was an earnest of the far more awful doom which awaited them in another world. “He sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.” (Matt. xxii. 7.)

But,

IV HOW DOES THIS MATTER CONCERN US? ARE THERE ANY AMONG US WHO IMITATE THEIR EXAMPLE; AND, IF SO, WHAT ARE THE CAUSES, AND WHAT IS THE REMEDY OF THE EVIL?

What is all this to us? I answer, The Christian church is Christ's spouse; each of us are invited to be the bride—invited to the marriage-feast—invited by the light of nature, by revelation, by special messengers, by angels, by the King's Son, by God the Father. — —

We profess to be members of the visible Church; we have been favoured with his Oracles even more than the Jews, not only with the Old Testament, but also the New; we profess to believe them, and understand, and experience, or, at least, to be seeking spiritual religion; we attend the house and ordinances of God continually; we read and pray, and have the form of godliness; we profess to be moral in our conduct, charitable, and to have great zeal for the truth. -- --

But do we make light of these things? Yes; it must be admitted many of us do.—They do so, who do not deeply consider the Gospel, its doctrines, duties, privileges, threatenings, and promises,—who are not deeply impressed and affected by these things,—who do not esteem them as deserving their highest regard, and are not more concerned about them than about all other things, as St. Paul was, (Phil. iii. 8,)—who prefer their farms, or merchandise, or their professions, or business, or their pleasures, or their most near and dear relations, or their own life, to Christ and his Gospel,—who delay to a more convenient season “the king-

dom of God, and his righteousness," which ought to be sought "first."—who are not brought to true and effectual repentance, and to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance,"—who rest before they be actually found in Christ by faith, (Phil. iii. 8, 9,)—who come, as they suppose, to the marriage-feast, and are even united with the people of God, but do not put on the wedding garment,—who, having put it on, put it off again, and backslide,—who do not, day by day, partake of the marriage-feast, (for it yet lasts, and will continue till the marriage is consummated in heaven,) and do not feed on the spiritual food, provided for the refreshment and nourishment of the inward man. — —

But what are the causes why men make light of the Gospel?—These are ignorance; they do not understand it;—Inattention and thoughtlessness;—Unbelief respecting it;—Hardness of heart;—The carnal mind averse to the spirituality of the Gospel, both in its doctrines and duties. There is no suitableness between the natural appetites, and the spiritual banquet to which we are invited;—Aversion to the cross, or fear of reproach and persecution;—The commonness of these blessings;—A mistaken opinion of our state, fancying we are already at the feast, or may come when we will, and can will when we please. — —

The sin, folly, and danger, is as great to us as it was to the Jews; nay, in some respects, it is greater, as our privileges are greater than theirs. — —

But what is the cure, or the means to be used, that we may not make light of it?—We must consider that these blessings are most important, absolutely necessary, and infinitely valuable.—That God, and not a human prince, invites us.—That, in making light of

these things, we make light of God, of his Christ, and our own souls; of our salvation, of heaven, of hell.—That the things we prefer to them are worthless, contemptible, and of short duration; that farms, merchandise, ground, oxen, and whatever else we are disposed to prefer to Christ, must all vanish.—That, as professing Christians, we ought to be consistent.—That salvation, though now neglected, will be valued when it is too late, and that the time is near, when this will appear to have been indeed the ‘one thing needful.’—We must search the Scriptures,—and pray,—“always pray,”—that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of our calling,” that he may “betroth us to himself” in Christ, and finally permit us to sit down to the “marriage-supper of the Lamb.”

LXXV.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

(FIRST SERMON.)

MATTHEW XXV. 1—4.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

IN the preceding chapter we have an account of several predictions, which our Lord delivered to his disciples before his glorification, relating, chiefly, to the destruction of the Jewish capital and nation, but expressed in terms figurative of the consummation of all things, and the future judgment. Christ did not inform them of the exact period when these events would take place. On the contrary, he tells them, “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” (Ch. xxiv. 36.) But from these solemn and alarming discoveries made to his disciples, our Lord draws a most useful and necessary exhortation, which is never unseasonable; “Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come:” (ver. 42:) which he again repeats, (ver. 44,) in different words, “Therefore, be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.”

Now, it was with a view to explain and enforce this exhortation, that the parable before us was introduced;

as plainly appears, not only from the connection in which it stands, but also from the obvious meaning of the parable itself, and the inference wherewith it is concluded, the same in substance with that just mentioned. "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of man cometh." (Ver. 13.) In order also to urge the same exhortation, confessedly of the deepest importance, I have made choice of this parable for the subject of our present meditation; to understand which, we must never lose sight of what we have observed to be the scope and design of it.

I propose,

I. TO MAKE A FEW EXPLANATORY OBSERVATIONS UPON IT.

Referring to what he had just observed concerning his second coming, and the end of the world, our Lord tells his disciples in the beginning of this parable, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." The kingdom of heaven is here put for the subjects of that kingdom, or the professors of Christianity; who, with reference to their character and conduct preparatory to the second coming of Christ may be compared to these ten virgins. To understand this we must be informed of some of the customs of the Jewish marriages, as well as those of the other eastern countries. "With them it was usual for the bridegroom to bring home his bride in the evening, sooner or later, as it might happen. And that she might be received properly at his house, his younger female friends were

invited to come and wait with lamps, till some of his retinue, dispatched before the rest, brought word that he was at hand; upon which they went forth with their lamps trimmed and burning, to welcome him, and conduct him with his bride into the house. And for this service they had the honour of being guests at the marriage-feast." Our Lord, in this parable, mentions *ten*, rather than any other number of virgins, because this was the general number appointed at their weddings to wait upon the bridegroom.

This being premised, we must next consider how this is applicable to Christ and his Church. The bridegroom here spoken of, denotes the Lord Jesus, who, in many places of Scripture, especially in the Canticles, and in the 45th Psalm, is represented as standing in this relation to his people. This is done to signify his exceeding great love to them, the concern he has for their welfare, the care he takes of them, and the interest they have in him; accordingly, the Apostle exhorts husbands to "love their wives as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it. So ought men to love their wives," adds he, "as their own bodies. No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Here we may remark how nearly related his people are to the Lord Jesus, how dear they are to him, and what they may expect from him. The affection which the most indulgent husband bears to the wife of his bosom, and the care he takes of her, as the greatest of all his earthly comforts, but faintly represents the love of Jesus to his spouse, the Church, and the care he takes of his people. He fails not to protect them in danger,

to deliver them from their enemies, and to supply all their wants out of his fulness. Yea, he gives himself, in his person and offices, his grace and glory, to his whole Church in general, and to every individual believer in particular. He is theirs, and they are his. Only it is to be observed, that believers, while in this world, are but espoused to Christ. The solemnization of the marriage is deferred till that day, when the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall have made herself ready.

By the virgins in the parable, we are to understand the professors of religion, the members of the Church of Christ. They are called *virgins* to denote their purity, and their beauty; not that which is natural to them, but the supernatural gift of God. They are, by nature, like the rest of the world, unholy, impure, polluted, as "an unclean thing, and all their righteousness is as filthy rags." But the Lord, their heavenly Bridegroom, "gave himself for them, that he might sanctify and cleanse them, and present them to himself, a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Therefore, when they were "polluted in their blood, he said unto them, Live;" he "passed by them, and looked upon them, and behold it was a time of love." He "spread his skirt over them, and covered their nakedness; yea, sware unto them, and entered into a covenant" with them, and they "became his." Then he gave them that "faith which worketh by love," which "overcometh the world," and, therefore, "purifieth the heart" from all vile affection. Hence, notwithstanding every object of desire and love in this world, and every allurements from without, or natural propensity within, God is their chosen portion. The language of their hearts is, "My beloved is mine, and

I am his;" "he is the fairest among ten thousand, yea, altogether lovely." Thus being "renewed in the spirit of their minds," and invested with the Divine image, it may well be said of them, that they are "all glorious within, and their clothing is of wrought gold." Having "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," as their righteousness and sanctification, and no longer making "provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof," they are beautified with his beauty, and comely through the comeliness wherewith he has adorned them, whence he can address each of them, saying, "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee."

Now it was necessary that the virgins who attended at a wedding should have lamps, and that their lamps should be lighted. What this represents it is not hard to say. A lamp is intended to afford light, when the sun has withdrawn himself below our horizon. Just so the possessors of true religion are raised up and appointed by the Lord Jesus, to enlighten this benighted world, by their exemplary and edifying conversation, in the absence of the Sun of Righteousness. "Ye are the light of the world," said Jesus to his disciples. "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house." He adds, "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven." So that a holy and unblameable conduct, which is agreeable to the word of God, and calculated to direct others in the way wherein they ought to go, which scatters the darkness of sin and nature, and diffuses all around the light of life, seems here to be intended by a *lighted lamp*.

Such a deportment as is described by the Apostle, where he exhorts the Philippians, (ch. ii. 1, 2,) to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine,” says he, “as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.” By *the Word of Life*, he means, the Gospel. This the followers of Christ should “hold forth” in the whole tenor of their conversation. They themselves should be cast into the mould of the Gospel. Every feature and lineament thereof should, so to speak, be engraven upon them. All their tempers, words, and works, should be influenced by, and conformable to, the truth as it is in Jesus. And when this is the case, their behaviour will be edifying to all around them, and they will be able to say to others, “Be ye followers of us, even as we are of Christ.”—

Again. It was the office of the virgins to attend and expect the bridegroom. And the very same is the duty and character of Christians: they attend upon, and wait for, Christ. “If any man serve me,” said Jesus, “let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be.” They strive to imitate his example, and keep his commandments. They wait upon him in all the ordinances of his appointment, that they may know his will, and are ever ready to execute it. They attend him as honorary servants do their master. For “as a girdle cleaveth unto the loins of a man, so have I made the whole house of Israel cleave unto me,” saith the Lord, “that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.” They live in daily expectation of his second coming. This was the case with the primitive Christians, as ap-

pears from various passages of the New Testament. Thus the Corinthians (1st Epist. i. 7) are said to have been "waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus," as also the Thessalonians. (1st Epist. i. 10; and Phil. i. 20.) The Apostle affirms concerning the real Christians of his day, in general, that "their conversation," (*πολιτευμα*), their citizenship, "was in heaven, from whence they looked for the Lord Jesus Christ, to change their vile body." And the very same has been the character of real Christians in every age, and is to this day; they live in continual expectation of the second coming of Christ, their heavenly Bridegroom, that their nuptials may be solemnized in the presence of their Father, and his holy angels.

What I mean is, they maintain upon their minds a deep and constant sense of death and judgment, and a continual expectation of those events, as liable to happen every moment, and as replete with the richest blessings to be conferred upon them. They are conscious of their frailty and mortality; it is a settled principle in their hearts, that death is not only certain, but near; and being convinced of the vanity and misery of this world, and of their interest in the happiness of another, they rather hope for, than fear, their dissolution. Though to them "to live is Christ," yet because "to die is gain," they cannot but even "desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better." While "in this tabernacle, they groan being burdened, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with their house which is from heaven." They expect the fulfillment of Christ's promise, that he will return and "see them again, that their hearts may rejoice, and their joy no man take from them." They believe that the bride

“will be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work, and the virgins, her companions, shall be brought to her;” when “with gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought, they shall enter into the King’s palace.” Then shall the marriage be solemnized, and avowed before angels and men. Then shall they dwell with him in the heavenly city, and share with him that fair inheritance his Father hath appointed for them.

Now, though the virgins mentioned in the parable had all lamps lighted, and professed to expect and attend the bridegroom, and therefore, were all so far alike, yet, it is said, “five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” And such is too often the case of the professors of religion. While their lamp of profession is bright, and they are considered by all men as the followers of Christ, perhaps in God’s sight, who searches the heart, not less than half of them are *foolish*, having only “a name to live when they are dead.” True religion is often called wisdom in Scripture, and irreligion, folly; and that with good reason. For what is true religion but the acting according to reason, enlightened by divine grace, according to conscience rightly informed, according to the will of an infinitely wise God, who invariably wills what is wisest in itself, and best for his creatures. And surely this is wisdom. To pursue the best end by the best means has ever been accounted the highest wisdom; now the best end which a rational creature can pursue is the glory of God and his own happiness, and the best, indeed the *only* means whereby this can be attained, is by repentance, faith, and holiness.—With equal reason is irreligion, or sin, styled folly; for it is a contradiction to reason, to conscience, and to the will of an in-

initely wise God. The sinner is foolish, because he acts in opposition to the reason and nature of things; because he dishonours his God, and destroys his own soul. He fights against omnipotence, he rushes upon the thick bosses of God's buckler, "he kicks against the pricks," he wilfully plunges into the wrath of God, and feeds that fire which will consume him for ever. Foolish man! How will his folly be manifested, by and by, to angels, and to men.

But observe, how the wise virgins discovered their wisdom, and the foolish their folly. "The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Besides the oil which supplied their lamps at present, they took care for a future supply, by carrying oil in other vessels, together with their lamps. Now, as by the lamp burning, we understand an exemplary profession of religion, an unblameable conversation, so by the oil which feeds the lamp, we must understand the grace of God, which only can make our profession truly exemplary, and our conversation universally holy; and by the vessel may be meant the heart, where Divine grace principally operates, and from whence it influences our whole conduct. Here then appears the wisdom of a real Christian; while he labours to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour, by walking outwardly in "all God's ordinances, and commandments, blameless," he takes care to secure and maintain the grace of the Spirit in his heart, that the lamp of his profession may not go out for want of a supply, his hopes be blasted, or his expectations perish. He makes "the tree good, that the fruit may be good also;" he purifies the fountain that the streams may be pure, and continue so; he "lives in the Spirit," and then "walks in the Spirit:"

he is "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, and so walks in them." His very nature is changed, in consequence of which the change in his conduct is constant and lasting.

Let it be observed here, that the grace which I speak of as changing his heart, is the power of the Holy Ghost, his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences; and that this grace is derived from Christ; "out of whose fulness" only we can receive "grace to help in time of need." This is beautifully represented to us in the prophecy of Zechariah, under the figure of olive trees, which supplied the lights in the golden candlestick with oil, by the means of pipes appointed for that purpose. Such is the intercourse real Christians have with Christ. In answer to their believing prayer, he communicates to them out of his fulness, grace adequate to their various necessities; yea, he himself "dwells in their hearts by faith;" they have union and fellowship with him, and with the Father through him; they "dwell in God and God in them." And by maintaining this intercourse they show their wisdom, for they shall never be disappointed, but his grace on all occasions "shall be sufficient for them."

But the foolish did not attend to this. They indeed took their lamps, nay, it seems, had them lighted too. They professed religion, and their profession was eminent and edifying; but "they took no oil with them," except what kept their lamps burning for the present. They did not secure and maintain the converting, renewing grace of God in their hearts. They did not get and keep fellowship with God through the Mediator. They had not "Christ in them the hope of glory." They contented themselves with "a form of godliness with-

out the power," with an outward regularity of conduct, while their hearts were still unchanged. They "made clean the outside of the cup and platter," while within they were still filthy and polluted. Hence their folly soon became manifest to all; for they found themselves destitute of grace when they stood most in need of it, and having neglected the gracious opportunities afforded them, "the things belonging to their peace were for ever hid from their eyes."

Alas! how many professors of Christianity imitate their example; and, therefore, meet with their disappointment and ruin! To say nothing of former ages, in which we learn there were many foolish virgins, many who said they were Jews or Christians, "but were not, being of the synagogue of Satan;" surely in this age we cannot help observing many professors of religion, who neither experience its power, nor practise its precepts. And this is quite agreeable to the prediction of the Apostle, who speaks expressly by the Spirit, "that in the latter times some would depart from the faith;" and again informs us, that "in the last days men (professors in general, for of such he is speaking) would become lovers of themselves, proud, boastful, covetous, unthankful, unholy, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," and, to conclude their character, "having the form of godliness, but denying the power." Alas! how plainly is this now the case, and that among all sects and parties!—While many Christians, so called, renounce the fellowship of the Spirit altogether, confining inspiration to primitive times, and deeming all pretensions to it in our day as the height of enthusiasm, or a symptom of madness; others seem to think it enough that they hear, and read, and talk about such

things, being quite satisfied without the real enjoyment of them. Others again who admit, and appear to contend for, the doctrine of the Spirit's influences, yet grievously err in their notions about the matter, mistaking a transient emotion in the affections for that vital religion which flows from union with Christ through the Spirit. They do not consider that this implies the receiving out of his fulness grace to enable us to believe, love, and obey; to watch, pray, and strive; "to deny ourselves. and take up our cross and follow Jesus;" grace to make us conformable to his holy example, in humility, meekness, patience; in zeal, resignation, diligence; introducing into our souls "the mind that was in Christ," that we may "walk as he walked," abiding in him, and "bringing forth much fruit."

As there is reason to fear lest some of you, my brethren, should deceive yourselves upon this head, imagining you are *wise*, when you are really *foolish*, virgins; and as I am convinced there was never more need to urge the exhortation given by St. Paul to the Corinthians, (2 Epis. xiii. 5,) "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates;" ye will excuse my proceeding further in the explanation of the parable, at present, that I may have time for

II. AN APPLICATION OF WHAT HAS NOW BEEN ADVANCED.

And let me exhort you to examine your conduct and experience, that you may ascertain whether you are to be ranked with the wise or foolish virgins. To assist

you herein, I will sum up what has been said, by way of inquiry, and ask, Do you profess the religion of Jesus? and, in proof of the truth of your profession, do you abstain from all known sin, attend all the appointed means of grace, and do good according to your power? Are you espoused to him as the heavenly Bridegroom, or are you companions of his bride, the Church? Companions in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience, of Jesus? And have you your lamp of profession lighted? I mean, is your conduct irreproachable, and edifying, so that you shine as a light in the world, and show others "how they ought to walk, and to please God?" Is "your conversation such as becometh the Gospel;" and do you "look for the Lord Jesus Christ to change your vile body, and fashion it like to his glorious body?" Do you live under a continual apprehension of death and judgment, and are you daily making preparation for these grand and dreadful events?

All this you may think you do, and yet be no better than a foolish virgin still. I must therefore ask again, Is not only your conduct, but likewise your spirit, right in the sight of God? Have you, besides the lighted lamp of an outward profession, the inward oil of grace in your heart? "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed;" and do his influences enlighten, sanctify, and comfort your soul? Are you engrafted into Christ, the living stock, and from him do you derive the sap of grace, which, circulating through all your powers, makes you bud and blossom, and bring forth fruit? Are "you one with Christ, and Christ, with you," so that he "dwells in your heart by faith," and you have fellowship with him through the eternal Spirit? And is "the love of God shed abroad in your

heart by the Holy Ghost given to you," "whereby you cry, Abba, Father," and are you filled "with all joy and peace in believing?" Knowest thou not, that without this inward religion thou art nothing in the sight of God, but "as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal?" Knowest thou not, that nothing availeth in Christ Jesus, but "faith that worketh by love;" "but a new creation;" and that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his?"—Without this internal and vital godliness, whereof I speak, arising from the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit of grace, all these external duties and services will little avail thee; but, notwithstanding thou art no more than a foolish virgin still, who "hast indeed a name to live, and art," in reality, "dead," dead to God now, and in a state of condemnation to the second death!

You see, my brethren, this parable chiefly concerns the professors of religion, those who have, at least, the form of godliness, whose conduct is outwardly regular and exemplary. And it is with these we have chiefly to do in this inquiry; for as to all others, all open sinners, of whatever stamp, there can be no dispute to whom they belong, or what their end shall be hereafter. With respect to all drunkards, swearers, sabbath-breakers; all fornicators, adulterers, unclean persons; all that are guilty of oppression, fraud, violence; all that injure their fellow creatures in their person, property, or character; all liars, slanderers, evil-speakers; all tale-bearers, contumelious, proud, boasters; all that are uncerciful to the bodies or souls of their fellow creatures, who, though they have it in their power, neglect to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and relieve the oppressed; all that

neglect the ordinances of God, such as prayer, whether in public or private, reading the Scriptures, attending the ministry of the word, and receiving the tokens of our Saviour's dying love; in short, all who outwardly violate the laws of justice, mercy or truth, towards their fellow-creatures, of piety towards God, or of sobriety towards themselves, who commit open sin of any kind, or omit outward duties;—with regard to all such, there is no room for examination here, since they have not even a name to live, but, by their conduct, loudly proclaim to all around, who have ears to hear, and an understanding to judge in spiritual matters, that they “are of their father the Devil,” whose “works they do,” and are even “dead in trespasses and sins.”

O ye who are of this number, who declare your sin as Sodom, and hide it not; who, by profaneness and immorality, by commission of open sin, and omission of external duties, carry the mark of the beast upon your forehead, and manifest “whose you are, and whom you serve,” permit me for a moment to address you.—Be it known unto you that “you have neither part nor lot in this matter.” We are not only unable to rank you with the *wise*, but even with the *foolish* virgins. No: they leave you far behind. Alas! You are no spiritual virgins at all, but “adulterers and adulteresses,” who “know not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God;” or rather you are dogs, who vomit up your own shame; or swine, who love to “wallow in the mire.” You are a scandal to the christian name, and cause the religion of Christ to become “a bye word among the heathen.” For you, therefore, is “treasured up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of God's righteous judgement;”

for you "is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever," which, if your repentance prevent not, shall infallibly be your portion; wherefore, we warn you, "be not deceived; God is not mocked;" as sure as he is a Being of unspotted holiness, and inflexible justice, so surely, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; they who sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption."*

* The Author appears to have added some further application and improvement of the subject, which the Editor regrets to find is wanting in the manuscript.

LXXVI.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

(SECOND SERMON.)

MATTHEW XXV. 5—12.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know ye not.

IN a former discourse on this parable, we have considered the character and conduct of the professors of religion, as they are distinguished, by our Lord, under the title of wise and foolish virgins. We now come, in pursuance of our subject, to take a view of the consequences of their conduct, and the very different fate they experienced. Of this we are informed in the latter part of this parable, which I proceed first to explain, and then to apply and improve.—

These verses are allowed by most to be attended with some difficulty, arising, perhaps, from a too scrupulous endeavour to explain every particular phrase in the parable, instead of attending rather to the scope and design of the whole, which is manifestly to enforce upon us the great duty of watchfulness, in order that neither death nor judgment may surprise us unprepared. For, I think, we may consider this parable as referring to both, or to either of these events, and at the same time do perfect justice to what I have observed is its principal design. Our Lord comes to call us hence by death, or he comes to judge the world in righteousness, and it concerns us to be ready for his appearance in both of these ways, for in respect to both it may be said, “in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.”—Taking it for granted, then, that I may lawfully apply the passage before us to the coming of Christ to call us hence by death; I will make a few EXPLANATORY OBSERVATIONS upon it in this point of view.

Now we are informed, concerning these wise and foolish virgins, that, “while the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.” When, in consequence of justification through the merits of Christ, and regeneration by the operation of the Holy Ghost, persons first receive a title to God’s eternal kingdom, they frequently desire to depart hence, and enter upon the possession of that fair inheritance reserved for them. And, as we are wont to expect what we strongly desire, they are often inclined to think it will not be long before their heavenly Bridegroom, who is gone “to prepare a place for them,” to whom they are “betrothed in righteousness,” will return to

solemnize their nuptials, and “receive them to himself, that where he is they may be also.” Now, though in one sense they are not mistaken, the longest life being soon over, and our abode on earth being very short in comparison of eternity, yet they are not perhaps actually called hence so soon as they expected. Their Lord sees meet to leave them a little longer in the world, that they may recover his whole image, and so be fitted for the beatific vision; that they may do his whole will, and thus be useful to their fellow-creatures; that they may endure their portion of affliction, and be “made perfect through sufferings.” The bridegroom therefore *tarries*.

Now while this is the case, believers too often, like the virgins in the parable, “slumber and sleep,” that is, grow remiss and careless. Their faith becomes inactive, their love cold, their desires languid. They abate of their zeal and diligence in doing good, and their patience in suffering ill. Like the church of Ephesus, they in some degree “leave their first love.” They begin to slumber, and afterwards fall into sleep; they proceed from bad to worse, not all at once, but insensibly, and by degrees. It is said, “they all slumbered and slept,” the wise as well as the foolish virgins; perhaps, to intimate unto us, that even the righteous are not enough awake and active. Indeed the wise, though they slept, kept their lamps burning, but certainly not so bright as they would have done, had they been properly awake to attend to them. They continued, I mean, exemplary in their conduct, though not in that degree which might have been. They likewise kept “oil in their vessels,” grace in their hearts. For while less active in fulfilling the divine will, their

hearts were still inspired with love to the Lord, and desire after him. But as for the foolish virgins, their lamps went entirely out.

And “at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.” Though death seem to tarry, yet it will surely come, and will not tarry long. Dust we are, and unto dust, sooner or later, we must all return. And it generally comes at *midnight*, that is at a time of rest and security, when it is least expected. So it came to the rich man mentioned in the Gospel. While he foolishly thought to satisfy his soul with earthly goods, and promised himself months and years to come of ease and pleasure, he had not another night to live. For God said to him, “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.” So it fares with many, both professors and profane. Death makes his gloomy appearance when they think of nothing less. “In such an hour as they think not the Son of Man cometh,” and demands their souls of them.

However, he often, in one way or another, gives us previous notice of his approach, though, perhaps, not so long before hand as to afford time for settling our accounts, if not adjusted before. Thus we are told, “there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh;” death cometh. He hath bent his bow, and levelled his shaft at thy heart. It is on the wing, and soon will give a mortal wound! Such a cry is made when our friends, neighbours, or relations, are cut down around us. So the Poet has it.

“For us they sicken, and for us they die.”

God intends their death as a warning to us, that we may be wise by their folly, and may learn experience by what they suffer; that conscious of our frailty and mortality we may not, whatever they have done, neglect to “prepare to meet our God.” And

“When by the bed of languishment we sit,
And o’er our dying friends in anguish hang,
Wipe the cold dew, or stay the sinking head,
Number their moments, and in ev’ry clock,
Start at the voice of an eternity;
See the dim lamp of life just feebly lift
An agonizing beam, at us to gaze,
Then sink again, and quiver into death.
How read we such sad scenes?—

Have we no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no hearts to understand the language of such dispensations? Surely the Lord then cries aloud, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!” Prepare for death, since he will soon be upon thee. He has arrested and confined in his dark and dreary prison thy father,—brother,—wife,—child. Thy turn may be next, therefore be thou also ready. Such a cry is made, and re-made; it is doubly loud when we are afflicted in our own persons, when pain and sickness speak, and will be heard, whether we will or no. These are intimations to us that our house of clay is mouldering into dust, and will soon become incapable of accommodating its former inhabitant, and they are warnings to prepare a new abode. They give us notice that death is undermining our constitution, and sapping the foundation of life, by steady, swift, and irresistible approaches, and, therefore, as we cannot hold out, we must provide for our safety the best way we can. Thus did the virgins in our text.

“Then all those virgins arose.”

“At death’s toll, whose restless iron tongue
Calls daily for his millions at a meal,
Starting they woke.”—

Thus they were roused to a sense of their danger,—shook off their lethargy and indolence, and stirred themselves up to lay hold on “the Lord their righteousness,” “mighty to save.” They “trimmed their lamps.” If this is considered as spoken of the wise, it denotes the solemn preparation they saw it needful to make for death, though already “justified” by grace and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” They recollected, and deeply lamented, the sins of their whole life; they exercised faith on Christ afresh, for a renewed application of his pardoning mercy and reconciling love. By faith they derived, out of his fulness, grace to help in this time of trial, and to renew them after the divine image, even that complete holiness, without which they could not see the Lord, and at the same time they regulated whatever might be amiss in their deportment, that they might leave an instructive example to posterity, and bear their testimony to the power of religion, as well as save their own souls.

The foolish virgins also, it seems, began to trim their lamps too; but, alas! having no oil wherewith to supply them, they unexpectedly went out, when there was the greatest need of their continuing to burn. Having no union or intercourse with Christ, and, of consequence, no communications of grace from him, the sufferings and trials which now overtook them, made them fret and repine, rendered them peevish and impatient, and so discovered the emptiness of their

religious profession. They would gladly have saved the credit of it, but they could not!

Accordingly, we are informed, “the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.”—Our lamps are gone out! What a time was this to make such a discovery! The cry was made, the bridegroom at the door, and now it behoved them to go forth with their burning lamps to meet him, when, behold! their lamps were gone out! and what was yet worse, there was no possibility of getting them lighted! Foolish virgins indeed! Why did they provide lamps at all, if they did not keep them burning till the bridegroom came, to attend on whom they had received them. “Our lamps are gone out!” that is, says Henry, “our profession is withered, and the credit of it is lost; our hopes are blasted, and the comfort of them is gone.” This is too often the case with the professors of religion, even while they have health and strength. “As the dog returns to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire,” so do they return to sin and folly. Having “begun in the Spirit,” they end “in the flesh.”

Sometimes, however, it is otherwise. Many hypocrites and formalists keep up their empty profession, and feed their false hopes, till the pains of death arrest them; but no longer. “For what is the hope of a hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God shall take away his soul.” It shall then, at least, perish, and become like “the spider’s web,” frail and brittle, incapable of yielding any comfort or support. It shall desert him when he has most need of it, as Absalom’s mule deserted him in the oak, when he most wanted it to convey him from his pursuing enemies. Yes;

though it accompany him through this wilderness to the very borders of Canaan, yet when he stands shuddering on the brink of death, it will leave him to pass that untried, deep, and rapid river by himself. The billows rise and swell, his confidence fails him, and his heart is discouraged; his limbs are enervated, and his strength is gone; he ceases to strive in vain against the stream, and is furiously borne down into the gulf of despair, from whence he never emerges. Unhappy man! whatever comfort his false hope afforded him in his pilgrimage through life, it now remands all with interest. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have at mine hand, saith the Lord, ye shall lie down in sorrow." And a woeful sorrow you will find it, for "the hope of the hypocrite shall be like the giving up the ghost." Ye shall part with your hopes with dreadful reluctance, as ye part with your souls!

Observe farther the application of the foolish virgins to the wise for relief. "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." They now saw their need of oil when none was to be had, and were left to lament their folly in not providing some in time. So it will fare sooner or later with all formalists and backsliders; they will one day see their need of that renewing grace of God, of that union with Christ by faith, which they now neglect and disregard, if not ridicule and despise. And then, as the foolish virgins applied to the wise, whom they before perhaps despised and derided, as needlessly provident, they will be constrained to become petitioners to those humble, contrite, watchful, and holy souls, whom they before held in the greatest

contempt, and reviled as “righteous overmuch.” “Give us of your oil;” that is, pray for us, recommend us to the mercy of God. Whatever interest you have with the Lord, use it on our account. Thus, I think, we must understand their request, as begging the help of their prayers rather than a share of their grace, which these virgins, foolish as they were, could not suppose the wise could grant. But their petition, whatever was its purport, and supposing it sincere, came too late.

For “the wise answered, saying, Not so.” The words *Not so* are not in the Greek, but are supplied by our translators. The wise would hardly give so peremptory a denial, which would seem like insulting the miserable disappointment of their companions, whom doubtless they pitied, and were inclined to help if they could; but knowing their inability, they replied with a tender and beautiful abruptness, expressive of their surprise that they had so long deceived themselves,—“Lest there be not enough for us and you.” As if they had said, “Alas for you! are you without oil now, when the bridegroom is come, and you ought to attend him! Your lamps out now, when it above all concerned you to have them lighted! And what can we do for you? We have oil little enough for ourselves, and none to spare for you. Shame for us! we have been sleeping like you, and our stock wasting. We are very ready to help you, ready to pray for you; but, alas! we have time little enough to pray for ourselves. Besides, what will our prayers avail, if you pray not. ‘Go ye then, rather to them that sell.’ Go to God; in your Father’s house is oil enough and to spare. Go to Christ; ‘in him are hid all the treasures’ of grace and glory. Go to the ordinances; these are the channels, by which

grace is conveyed to the souls of the children of men. 'Buy for yourselves;' get grace of your own, Christ in your hearts, for our grace will not avail you."

It is impossible to conceive the perplexity, confusion, and dismay, which must overwhelm those poor wretches who are in the condition of the foolish virgins; who have all along deceived themselves with false hopes, and never discovered their mistake till under the arrest of death! How dreadful to see the lamp of life just expiring, and dying into everlasting darkness, and the grand business of life unfinished, nay, not begun! To see the glass of our time run out, and that momentous work for which we came into the world, the work of an age, nay of ten thousand ages, were so many allotted us, all to do, and no time to do it in! To find ourselves forced to the tremendous precipice, shuddering on the verge of life, under an absolute, unavoidable necessity of plunging into the deep abyss, and at the same time to be conscious that we are wholly unprepared!

View that ghastly and dying man! while his body is emaciated with wasting disease, and racked with violent pain, his soul indulges the melancholy, the heart-rending reflection, that he had once life and death, happiness and misery, set before him! He remembers that mercy was offered to pardon his sins, and grace to renew his nature, and that he was kindly invited, yea, earnestly entreated to accept those blessings, at a thousand different times, and in a thousand different ways. God himself even condescended, in the person of a suffering, bleeding, dying Saviour, to beseech and urge him to a reconciliation; a reconciliation which could not profit God, but would enrich the sinner with glory

and happiness, inconceivable and eternal! He recollects he was informed of his danger, and warned of the consequences of not complying with God's gracious design, while he was infallibly assured of bliss and immortality if he did. With shame and sorrow he recollects how he neglected these offers, despised these counsels, slighted these warnings; how he steeled his heart against conviction, and spent that time in impertinence and folly, in sin and wickedness, which should have been spent in watchfulness and prayer, in "striving to enter in at the strait gate," in "giving all diligence to be found of Christ in peace, and without spot, and blameless." And now his day of probation is over, his lot determined, and his state fixed for endless woe! He must now enter the invisible world, and plunge into a wide eternity, covered with the leprosy of sin, and oppressed with a mountain of guilt.—The burden of his transgressions presses hard upon his soul, and forces from it the most doleful lamentations, bitter regrets, and self-accusing complaints. And no sooner is it disunited from the body, dislodged from its mouldering tenement of clay, than it sinks under the enormous weight, to the bottom of that deep and fiery lake, which deluges its ruined powers with an overflowing flood of misery and woe.

But to return to the virgins in our text.—"While they went to buy, the Bridegroom came." While they began feebly to breathe out their desires in prayer, if peradventure they might yet be heard; while they attempted to exercise repentance for their many sins, and act faith on the Lord Jesus for an interest in his pardoning grace; while they endeavoured to make some preparation for the Bridegroom's reception,—behold!

he came! Christ gave death its commission, and it mowed them down, ripe or unripe, ready or unready. He spared none, but executed his errand upon all. And "they who were ready went in with him to the marriage." They who had put on the wedding garment; who had an interest in Christ's obedience unto death, and were renewed by his Spirit; who had recovered the divine likeness, the whole image of their God; they who had done and suffered the whole will of God unto the end, while they had "kept themselves unspotted from the world;" they, (to speak in the language of Christ,) whose "loins were girded, and their lamps burning, and they themselves like men that wait for their Lord;" these "went in with him to the marriage." For "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

Their watching and fasting, their labour and toil, their pain and weariness, are now at an end. They are "absent from the body," and happily freed from all its infirmities, afflictions, and pains. The flesh no longer solicits, the world no longer allures, the Devil no longer tempts. They are no longer derided, insulted, persecuted. The tongue of slander and the hand of violence can annoy them no more. They "are present with the Lord." The heavenly Bridegroom takes them into his banquetting-house, and regales them with the delicious fruits of Paradise. They feast with him on the joys of angels, and drink at the fountain head of pleasures, while he kindly urges, "Eat, O friends! drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" He leads them into his chambers of delights, and "his banner over them is love." He unveils his beauties to them,

and tells them the melting story of his endearing kindness. His left hand is under their head, and his right hand doth embrace them. He gives himself to them, with all his infinite glory and bliss, to be enjoyed for ever and ever. He, with his unsearchable riches, is all their own for evermore. Hail! hail! ye happy souls, ye are highly favoured of the Lord! Your trials and afflictions were but for a moment; they are now over and gone, and an eternity of unutterable joy awaits you. When on earth, ye died with Christ, but ye now "live with him;" ye "suffered with him," but ye now "reign with him;" ye participate in his throne of glory, and are made "kings and priests unto God" for ever!

In the mean time "the door was shut;" the door of salvation, of pardoning mercy, and divine acceptance; the door of repentance, faith, and holiness; of grace and glory. This is always shut at death. It is universally acknowledged among Protestants, that "as the tree falls so it lies;" as death leaves us, judgment finds us. But is it not sometimes shut before death? there is reason to think it is. For "my Spirit;" says God, "shall not always strive with man." We may, no doubt, so grieve and do despite to the Spirit of God, that he will utterly forsake us, and give us up to the hardness of our hearts, and to a reprobate mind.

It is possible to sin away our day of grace and become examples of the truth of those awful declarations: (Prov. i. 24:) "Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hands but no man regarded; but ye set at nought my counsel and would none of my reproof. I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish

come upon you. Then shall they call, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

This exactly describes the situation of the foolish virgins. The door had been open once, and had stood open long. Long had they been urged to enter without delay: but then they had other business upon their hands, and other cares on their minds; then they had no inclination to enter, notwithstanding they were informed of their necessity, and that delays were dangerous. Whereas now, when the door was shut, and fast bolted against them by the irreversible decree of heaven, came the foolish virgins, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." Foolish enough truly, in these as well as in other instances, for, (as our text says,) they came "afterwards" After the market was over they came to buy; after "the mercy of God was clean gone for ever," and he had resolved to "be favourable no more;" after he had "shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure," and had determined to "be no more gracious;" after their sentence was past, and their state fixed for eternity. After this, (why did they not come before?) came the foolish virgins, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" that is, be merciful to us, pardon, and accept us, "bless us, even us, O our Father!"

Their confidence is worth remarking. In their petition, "Lord, Lord," say they. They lay claim to him as their Lord. No doubt they begun to say, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets; Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works?" Have we not professed thy name, attended thine ordinances, been regular in

our conduct, relieved the poor, preached thy word, converted sinners,—consider these things, Lord, and “open to us.” Observe their earnestness; “Lord, Lord.” They redouble the appellation, and show they are serious. They do not trifle or sleep now as they did before in prayer, much less do they despise or ridicule that duty. Affliction and death have taught them better. They are now deeply in earnest indeed, but it is too late, and, therefore, to no purpose. Had they been as earnest *before*, they would have succeeded, but then they thought it unnecessary; and now, “when they would have inherited the blessing, they are rejected, and find no place for repentance, though they seek it carefully with tears.” For “he answered and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I know you not;” ye pretended to be my friends, and to do me honour; but you have not acted as friends, nor do I acknowledge you as such.

Deferring the consideration of this and the following verses till a future opportunity, when I purpose to show how the parable may be applied to the second coming of Christ at the day of judgment, which seems to be its primary reference, I now conclude with some PRACTICAL APPLICATION and IMPROVEMENT of what has been advanced.

And, having in the close of the foregoing discourse chiefly addressed open sinners, I now apply myself to the foolish virgins, which I may do with greater effect after the view we have taken of their miserable end. Under this character I comprehend all hypocrites, who “make a fair show in the flesh,” that they may deceive others into an opinion of their great sanctity; all formalists, who, notwithstanding their outward regu-

larity of conduct, “have not oil in their vessels,” the “love of God shed abroad in their hearts;” and all backsliders, whose lamps were indeed once lighted, but are now become extinct. If you, my friends, belong to any of these classes, it matters not which;—if you are false pretenders, who aim to deceive others, or if you are empty formalists, who deceive yourselves, or if you are ungrateful backsliders, who have fallen from grace,—be assured you are the very foolish virgins characterized by our Lord in this parable, whose miserable infatuation and disappointment you have just heard described. And if you imagine, that though you bear their character, yet you shall escape their punishment, it is plain the infernal serpent beguiles you as he did your mother Eve, when he said, “Ye shall not surely die.” And it is well if you be not, by and by, given up to “this strong delusion to believe a lie,” that you “all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

But wilt thou believe the Devil who “was a liar from the beginning,” and the father of lies, rather than “the faithful and true Witness,” whose every word is firmer than the pillars of heaven? Wilt thou still expect to fare as well as the wise virgins, whose lamps are burning, and who have oil in their vessels, whose conduct is exemplary, and who have Christ in their hearts. Deluded man! knowest thou not that the “hope of the hypocrite shall be cut off, and his trust shall be a spider’s web;” it shall be swept away by the besom of death? Or thinkest thou to deceive the heart-searching God, as thou hast deceived thy fellow-creatures, who “look at the outward appearance?”—Thou formalist, hast thou not known that all thy reli-

gious observances, all thy modes and forms of piety and all thy external duties and works, of whatever kind, avail nothing without love, fervent love to God and thy fellow-creatures, destitute of which thou art unprofitable as a well without water, empty as a cloud without rain, and though as noisy, yet as unharmonious and disagreeable in the ear of God, “as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal?”—Thou backslider, how often must thou be told, that “if any man abide not in Christ he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned?” How long must we testify that “when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity,” “all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.” How repeatedly must we assure thee “it had been better thou hadst never known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto thee?”

O that God may convince thee, whosoever thou art, thou poor self-deceiver, that thou art building on a sandy foundation! Thy hope has no solid grounds, and if thou dost not relinquish it, it will most miserably disappoint thee. Awake, thou sleepy sinner! thy lamp is gone out; thou art destitute of oil, and the Bridegroom is at hand! The cry, “Behold, he cometh,” will soon thrill through thy inmost soul, make thy very blood run chill, and throw thee into the utmost confusion! Awake! awake! Hast thou slept away all sense and feeling? Knowest thou not where thou art? Hark, hark, man! it is the call of death. Death

knocks at thy door; he knocks for admittance, and will soon force an entrance, whether thou wilt or no! He has his commission from the Sovereign of heaven and earth, and comes armed with irresistible power to execute his errand upon thee!

And now, “why tarriest thou? Arise, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord!” “Go to them that sell, and buy (oil) for thyself.” Go to God, by faith in prayer. Remember, “with him there is mercy and plenteous redemption,” an inexhaustible storehouse of spiritual blessings. With him there is grace to pardon all thy past sins, to supply all thy present wants; and “he giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.” Wherefore, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” Plead his promises, and expect their fulfilment. They must be fulfilled in thee, or thou art undone for ever. Thou must get oil in thy vessel, and thy lamp lighted, or thou wilt surely be excluded when the Bridegroom cometh. Thy necessity is great, take no denial. There is no need thou shouldst, for he is more ready to hear than thou art to pray. “Ask,” therefore, “seek,” “knock;” be fervent and importunate in prayer.

“Tell him, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.”

Agonize to enter in; “stir up thyself to lay hold” on “the Lord thy righteousness,” who is “mighty to save.” Stretch out thy hand of faith, and take what his goodness waits to give. “Receive out of his ful-

ness grace for grace;" fill thy vessel with oil, and supply thy lamp. Thus, "take the kingdom by violence," and Christ will dwell in thy heart by faith," and fill thee with "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

At the peril of thy soul do not linger, do not trifle! Consider thy critical situation. Thou art destitute of real religion, of "fellowship with the father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Christ is not in thee "the hope of glory," and, therefore, whatever hope thou hast must be a false hope. Thou art not a child of God, or in a state of salvation, but a wretched sinner, under the guilt of all thy sins, the curse of the law, and the wrath of a sin-avenging God. Therefore, thou art every moment in danger of hell and damnation, being every moment exposed to the darts of death. Recollect the words of Jesus, and tremble, "At such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh," and "prepare to meet thy God. Convinced death generally comes when least expected, suddenly and unlooked for, as a thief in the night, "be thou also ready." "Watch unto prayer;" believe on Christ, and strive against sin, and for thy soul's sake rest not, till thou receive "the spirit of adoption," whereby thou criest, "Abba, Father," and "knowest thou art of God by his Spirit which he hath given thee."

I must not conclude this discourse without giving a word of advice to the wise virgins, in order that they may be wiser still.—My brethren in Christ, permit me, for a moment, to remind you of your office and duty.—You profess to expect and attend the Bridegroom. That he may not find you unprepared, never forget that as he certainly will come, and will not tarry long,

so he will probably come suddenly and unawares. If at any time you less expect him than another, it is not unlikely but he will then surprise you. Do not, therefore, cease looking for him at every time, and at every place. You know not whether he will come in the morning or evening, at noon or midnight. You know not whether he will arrest you in your bed, or at your table, in your shop, or in the field, sleeping or waking, riding or walking. Be then, always ready. "Let your loins be girded" for the journey of death, and "your lamps burning," and ye yourselves like unto men who wait for their Lord."

Referring to what was advanced in the foregoing discourse, I advise you to "cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart;" inwardly and outwardly tread continually in his steps, and "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Be attentive to his voice. Still let your heart, say, "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth;" "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" And let it be your "meat and drink to do his will," to fulfill all his pleasure. Receive his commandments and obey them: "Bind them about your neck, write them on the table of your heart," and, above all, exemplify them in your conduct. Be especially careful that "your conversation be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ;" that all your conduct be unblameable and exemplary, and that ye walk worthy of the Lord unto all well pleasing."

In order hereto, supply your lamps continually with fresh oil, and see that you duly trim them. I mean, let the graces of the Divine Spirit be put forth into exercise, and consider, and remove every obstruction to your fruitfulness. "Through the Spirit mortify the

deeds of the body that you may live.” “Lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset you, and let us run with patience the race set before us.” Let the vessel of your heart be well stocked with grace, and let that grace influence all your tempers, words, and works. Let your communion with God be deep, constant, and increasing, that being “partakers of the divine nature,” you may “be holy, as he who hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation and godliness.”

O beware of slumbering and sleeping! Awake, and keep awake. Never forget your critical situation, your dangerous circumstances. You are probationers for eternity, invited to possess eternal glory, and yet in danger of eternal infamy. Your enemies are mighty, numerous, and crafty. They hate you with perfect hatred, and will not fail to exert all their power and policy to bring about your destruction. Wherefore stand on your guard, and “resist them steadfast in the faith.” Never give back, never grow weary. Remember, the virgins in the parable *first* slumbered, and *then* slept; they gave way to the enemy by little and little; they fell from bad to worse, from one degree of remissness and indolence to another. Learn ye wisdom from this instance of their folly. *Venienti occurre morbo*; resist evil in its first approaches. “Be ye strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; take to yourselves the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand,” let your faith be yet more active, your love more fervent; let your hope abound still more and more by the power of the Holy Ghost, and be ye more zealous daily for the Lord of Hosts. Yes, my dear

brethren, give ye still greater “diligence to be found of him in peace, and without spot and blameless,” being “steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ” Thus when the Bridegroom cometh and knocketh, ye will open to him immediately. And “blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.” Verily I say unto you, he will gird himself, and serve them; and if he come in the second, or third, watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

LXXVII.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

(THIRD SERMON.)

MATTHEW XXV. 13.

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.

IN my last discourse upon this subject, I endeavoured to show how the latter part of this parable might be referred to our Lord's calling us hence by death; and it appears that to understand it in that light, as it does no violence to the text or context, nor offers any injury to any truth of the Gospel, so it effectually answers the principal scope and design of the parable, which is to recommend watchfulness. However, notwithstanding this there is reason to think that our Lord rather meant this parable to be understood of his coming to

take vengeance on particular nations, which had been favoured with the light of the Gospel, or to judge the world in righteousness; accordingly, many of the expressions used therein, in their most natural sense, are best adapted to this application of them. That I may not, therefore, misrepresent our Lord's words, or conceal any part of his meaning, especially his primary meaning, I request the liberty of giving you one more discourse upon the parable, in which, with a view to enforce still more the necessary duty of watchfulness, I shall endeavour to explain it with a reference to our Lord's coming to judgment.

As the second coming of Christ was a frequent subject of discourse, both with our Lord himself and also with his disciples, so they often spoke of it as being at hand. Thus Christ tells his disciples in the foregoing chapter; "immediately after the tribulation of those days, (speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the last great dispersion of the Jewish nation,) the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." To the same purpose St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, testifies, "The Lord is at hand;" and the Apostle James, in his General Epistle, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Now some of the primitive Christians, not considering that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," that no time is long or short with him, who exists from eternity to eternity, and sees

all things past, present, or to come, at one glance, and in one instant, were led by these expressions to suppose that our Lord would come to judgment in the time of their mortal life.

In confirmation of this opinion, they probably misapplied to his second coming at the end of the world, what our Lord only meant of the ruin of the Jewish nation,—“This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” And the Thessalonians in particular, who seem to have imbibed this sentiment as deeply as any, might derive it, or at least be confirmed in it, from an expression in St. Paul’s First Epistle, (iv. 17,) where, by a figure of speech very common with him and other sacred writers, he uses the first person, and includes himself, when he meant to be understood only of others. As St. James, speaking of the ungodly only, says, “The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy;” and with reference to the abuse of the tongue, “Therewith bless we God, and curse we men;” so St. Paul, meaning only those who should be found in the faith at our Lord’s second coming, and well knowing, as appears from the Second Epistle to the same church, that he would not be one of them, says, “We who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them, (who had been dead and raised again) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

But be this as it will, from whatever quarter they derived it, it is certain that this erroneous opinion had gained ground among the primitive Christians, and that the Apostles did not fail to show them their mistake: St Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, and St. Peter, in the third chapter of his Second General Epistle. They well knew that the Bridegroom

would tarry till all things were ripe for his coming,—till the prophecies were all fulfilled, the divine counsels all accomplished, the number of the elect completed, the patience of God manifested, the incorrigible, as “vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction,” and the righteous, as “vessels of mercy, prepared unto glory.” For such purposes as these does the Lord delay his coming, and especially that mankind may have space afforded them for repentance; for as St. Peter assures us, “he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Epist. iii. 9.)

In the mean time the world, instead of “accounting the long-suffering of our Lord salvation,” as the Apostle exhorts, and improving it accordingly, take occasion from hence to encourage themselves in sin and unbelief, while some of God’s people “fall from their steadfastness, being led away by the error of the wicked.” “Where,” say they, “is the promise of his coming? Do not all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world?” Thus they conclude, because he has not yet come, that he will never come, and so, “despising the riches of his goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering, after their hardness and impenitent heart, they treasure up unto themselves wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” This we see to be, in fact, the case even now with the generality of professing Christians, who are many of them infidels in theory, and many more in practice; and this we have reason to think will be especially the case at the time of Christ’s coming to take signal vengeance on any nation, if not also at the final consummation of all things. For “when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith in the earth?”

We fear very little. For "as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man; they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, till the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." And, likewise, "as it was in the days of Lot, even thus it shall be in the day when the Son of man is revealed;" they shall be blinded by infidelity and hardened by sin, so that they will not believe any day of judgment or retribution is approaching, nor will make any preparation for such an awful event. And in this light we may understand the words of this parable; "and while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept," as signifying the backsliding or apostacy of many professors of religion at our Lord's second coming.

Some indeed understand them as only speaking of the death of all in their different generations, whether wise or foolish, whether saints or sinners. And, doubtless, death is frequently called sleep in Scripture, both because it is the fittest emblem of death, and because such a representation is calculated to comfort believers and instruct all men. Death, like sleep, implies the suspension of all our senses, and yet not insensibility. It will prove a state of refreshment and comfort to the righteous, but of perplexity and torment to the wicked. And from death, as from sleep, both the righteous and the wicked will one day awake; awake after a long night of distress, or of joy, not arising from the imagination of delusive dreams, but from the feeling of certain realities; awake, when the heavens shall be no more, to shame and everlasting misery, or to honour and everlasting bliss.

For we are informed, “at midnight there was a cry made.” Midnight here, according to what was observed upon the foregoing verse, may be put figuratively for a time of darkness and security, such as we have already seen, is and will be the time of our Lord’s coming to take vengeance; a time of such prevailing ignorance and sin, of such universal indolence and sloth, as to all spiritual concerns, that it may fitly be called the midnight of the church and of the world. Indeed, it seems, with respect to mankind in general, a bright day shall precede this gloomy night. Many blessed promises, interspersed throughout the Scriptures, especially contained in the prophecy of Isaiah, and the Revelation by St. John, give us reason to expect a very glorious state of things, previous to the end of this world. Some have even supposed and endeavoured to prove, that Christ shall personally appear on earth in the glory of his regal state, and having gathered the Jews from their dispersions, and spread true religion throughout the whole world, shall reign a thousand years in Jerusalem, the capital of his kingdom. But I fear they understand literally what is meant figuratively, and, therefore, have no sufficient authority for such an expectation. Certain, however, it is, Satan shall be bound, that is, laid under restraint, for a thousand years, that he may not deceive the nations, and then the church of God shall arise and shine forth in meridian glory. “The Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising,” and “the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters do the sea,” before the consummation of all things.

After this, it seems, a dismal gloom shall again overspread mankind, and Satan, being again loosed out of

his infernal prison for a season, and knowing that his time is short, “shall go forth to deceive the nations that are in the four quarters of the earth,” gathering together Gog and Magog, and all the enemies of God’s people, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea; and when these, like so many wild beasts, roaming forth under the cover of this night of ignorance and sin, shall “go up on the breadth of the earth, and compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city,”—while these shall triumph in the vain hope of destroying the righteous from off the face of the earth, and in the beloved city itself, the wise and foolish virgins are slumbering and sleeping, at ease, and secure: behold! instantaneous “fire comes down from God out of heaven, to consume” the persecutors, and a sudden and dreadful cry alarms the professors of religion,—“The Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!” A cry this which must spread confusion, terror, and dismay, far and near, especially if, as I have elsewhere* observed, and as may be intimated in our text, it happen literally at midnight, during the silence, rest, and security of that unguarded hour! When the great source of light and joy has withdrawn himself below our horizon, and resigned our hemisphere to darkness and discomfort; when an universal silence reigns through all nature, and the busy world is hushed and quiet; when deep sleep hath fallen upon man, and general repose hath overspread the creation; behold, a hoarse, loud, and terrifying cry suddenly alarms the earth, and shakes the universe! “The trumpet shall sound,” says the Apostle, “and the dead shall be raised.” “The Son of

* See the Author’s Sermon on 2d Thessalonians, i. 8, 9.

Man shall send his angels," adds the Redeemer, "with the great sound of a trumpet, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

But concerning this cry, the Apostle informs us more fully still in the fourth chapter of his First Epistle to the Thessalonians. "The Lord himself," says he, "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." You see, besides the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, the Apostle mentions *a shout*, (*κελευσμα*, *a shout of triumph*), raised by those "thousand thousands that minister unto him," and those armies of heaven that follow him; or perhaps he means a noise arising from conflicting elements and demolished worlds. And how dreadful and alarming this noise will be, we may in some faint degree conceive, if we consider it will be the effect of earthquakes shaking and tossing the ground beneath; thunders bursting, and convulsing the heavens above; stars falling, and rushing from the firmament; fires inflaming and consuming the earth; the forests blazing, the rocks rending, the ocean boiling, the sky opening, the lightnings glaring, and in short the whole world thrown into final ruin and destruction. This is so finely described by Dr. Young, in his poem on "The Last Day," that I am persuaded that you will not be displeased with my quoting a few lines here. Only premising, you must make some allowance for that poetic liberty which the Doctor has so far indulged, as to lay himself open to the charge of inconsistency, were any body so insensible of the charm of his poetry, as not to forgive him a thousand such little inaccuracies. For though in his Night Thoughts he represents this dreadful catastrophe as

happening at midnight, yet here he alarms us with unexpected ruin overtaking us during the blaze of day. Thus,

“Thick clouds of darkness shall arise on day,
In sudden night, all earth’s dominions lay;
Impetuous winds the scatter’d forests rend,
Eternal mountains, like their cedars, bend,
The valleys yawn, the troubled ocean roar,
And break the bondage of his wonted shore;
From inmost heaven incessant thunders roll,
And the strong echo bound from pole to pole.”

In the mean time, while the living are confounded and struck dead with fear at the sight of such ruin, and by the noise of such convulsions, shaking all nature, and dashing in pieces this whole system of things; the dead are roused from their long sleep, and alarmed in their dreary mansions by the all-penetrating voice of the great Archangel, whose loud and irresistible words force their way into the bowels of the earth, enter the chambers of death, collect the scattered atoms, and again rebuild, of incorruptible materials, a new habitation for the immortal spirit. And no sooner does

——“The mighty trump, one half conceal’d,
In clouds, one half to mortal eye reveal’d,
Now pour its dreadful note.”

accompanied with this efficacious command, “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment,” than the quickening Spirit goes forth, impregnates the lifeless mass, and communicates an endless and indefectible life to the miserable captives of victorious death. Then is the ancient promise fulfilled, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death:

O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction!" Then is "brought to pass the saying that is written, "death is swallowed up in victory;" and then may all the redeemed triumph in their turn over their conquered enemy, and demand, "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory!"

Thus we learn from the parable, that "all those virgins arose." While the living are roused from their lethargy, or awakened out of their sleep of carnal security and intoxicating sin; while they are "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump;" while their "corruptible puts on incorruption, and their mortal immortality," that they may be capable of enjoying immortal bliss, or of suffering eternal pain;—"all who sleep in the dust of the earth awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." For, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive; but every one in his own order. As the poet says,—

"Not all at once, nor in like manner rise:
Some lift with pain their slow unwilling eyes,
Shrink backward from the horror of the light,
And bless the grave, and call for lasting night."

When, being instantaneously awakened out of their long but uneasy sleep, they open their eyes to behold a flaming earth, an assembled world, and a frowning Judge; a black catalogue of their enormous crimes presented to their view, a descending storm of almighty indignation bursting over their guilty heads, a yawning gulf of unfathomable ruin opening beneath their very feet, and on every side malicious and tormenting fiends eagerly expecting the Judge's command

to hurry the condemned criminals into the dismal prison of bottomless perdition; with what reluctance will they lift, as our poet has it, "their slow unwilling eyes!" Ah! how will they shrink backward from the sight of such woe, and long still to abide in their dreary mansions!

In the mean time the righteous are serene as innocence, and "bold as a lion." The wise virgins, conscious that they have "oil in their vessels, and their lamps burning;" conscious that they are espoused to the heavenly Bridegroom, and prepared for his reception, lift up their heads with cheerful and triumphant joy, knowing that their redemption, their full and complete redemption, is now come. Calm and undisturbed, they contemplate the blazing earth, the boiling ocean, the rending rocks, the melting elements, the disparting heavens, and the descending triumph of the Son of God, who, attended by myriads of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, principalities and powers, come, to "judge the world in righteousness," and to pass an irreversible sentence upon all the posterity of Adam! The peaceful and happy situation of their minds, during these tremendous circumstances, is also well described in the poem before mentioned:

"Such in this day of horrors shall be seen,
To face the thunders with a god-like mien,
An earth dissolving, and a heav'n thrown wide,
A yawning gulf, and fiends on every side,
Serene they view, impatient of delay,
And bless the dawn of everlasting day."

In the mean time, grim and surly Death, being obliged, however reluctant, to give up his captives, abdicate

his throne, resign his dominions, and submit to be the slave of his glorious Conqueror, is banished with his accursed progenitors, the Devil and Sin, and his miserable brood, guilt, fear, and shame, anxiety, pain, and woe, far from the mansions of heavenly joy, into the dreary dwellings of hellish torment. The Devil, Sin, and Death, are cast together into the lake of fire, from whence they shall never be released, nor suffered any more to disturb the favourites of heaven!

And now, while the whole race of the ungodly, without help and without hope, without plea and without resource, trembling, guilty, and self-condemned, await their dreadful doom; professors of all kinds, whether wise or foolish virgins, make ready for their trial, and prepare their defence; as the text says, “they trim their lamps.” They examine and endeavour to adjust their accounts; they try and labour to approve their conduct. And now an impartial and severe scrutiny being made, the foolish virgins discover, in a light at once new and surprising, that they have no grace; and the wise that they have none to spare. Hypocrites, formalists, and backsliders, if we could suppose, which certainly we cannot, that they will entertain any faint and false hope during the intermediate state; if we could imagine that they will flatter themselves with a vain expectation of being acquitted at the day of judgment, till they awake from the sleep of death; then, at least, when the books are opened, and every secret thing is brought to light, shall they be confounded to find that their “lamps are gone out,” that their profession is blasted, and their hopes are ruined for ever. Yes, “every man’s work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; for it shall be revealed by fire,

and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." And their light and airy fabric, reared of "wood, hay, and stubble;" of duties, forms, and ceremonies, shall perish like chaff before the scorching fire of that day.

And then, as they shall discern the worth and necessity of that grace, of which they are destitute, in a manner they never did before, so it is no wonder, if, in the midst of their surprise and distress, they apply for relief to the righteous, though, alas! to little purpose. "Give us of your oil," say they, "for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying,—lest there be not enough for us and you." The wise virgins will then find, by experience, what they now believe, that they were not "righteous overmuch" while on earth, and that they have religion little enough for themselves, and none to spare for others. When they begin to "trim their lamps," to search into their experience and behaviour, and prepare for their trial before Him, who was once their merciful Saviour, but is now their strict and impartial Judge; when, in the light of eternity, they examine their whole temper and conduct, and compare themselves with that law whereby they must be judged, not the Adamic law of innocence, but the Mediator's law of liberty, or, as the Apostle tells us, (Rom. ii. 16,) the Gospel of Christ Jesus; when they clearly behold the love shown them, the favours bestowed upon them, the grace vouchsafed to them, the means afforded them, the pains taken with them, and the capacities and talents conferred upon them; and when they recollect the weakness of their faith, the coldness of their love, the littleness of their gratitude, and the poor proficiency they have made amidst

so many gracious opportunities and powerful helps;—when they consider all this, they will doubtless blush and be ashamed of themselves, so far will they be from thinking that they have any works of supererogation wherein to trust, or whereof to boast; and though confident of their interest in the Redeemer, and through him of their title to the heavenly glory, yet will they judge themselves utterly unworthy of it, and, with a heart abashed by humility and flaming with gratitude, adopt the words of the royal Psalmist, in a more exalted sense than that in which he uttered them, “Not unto us, O Lord! not unto us, but to thy name give the praise.”

The foolish virgins, therefore, are disappointed in their application to the wise, who compassionately, but inconsiderately, and certainly in vain, advise them to “go to those who sell, and buy for themselves;” to address the divine mercy, that out of his fulness they might yet receive grace to fit them for the Bridegroom’s reception. And while, confounded and despairing, they attempt to take this kind, but mistaken advice; while they “go to buy,” or endeavour to obtain, by prayer and supplication, the religion of which they are destitute, and without which they cannot be accepted; while they fly hither and thither, in confusion, terror, and dismay, pouring forth insignificant cries, and groans, and tears, and vainly begging the interposition of that mercy which had long spared them, and waited in vain for their repentance;—in the mean time the Bridegroom comes, and “they that are ready go in with him to the marriage.”

The heavens open, and “depart as a scroll when it is rolled together;” and behold “a great white throne”

is instantly displayed, and the "Ancient of Days sits" upon it. His name is "called faithful and true, and in righteousness doth he judge and make war," passing sentence upon the human race according to strict and impartial justice, and rewarding the righteous and the wicked according to their works. "His garment is white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool," in token of his spotless purity and perfect understanding, "His eyes are as a flame of fire," piercing through all disguises, and penetrating into the secrets of every breast; and "upon his head are many crowns," in honour of his humiliation, whereby he conquered principalities and powers, and triumphed over all the enemies of his holiness; and hence too, he hath "a name written, which none knoweth but he himself;" the praise of his mediatorial undertaking being ineffable and incomprehensible. And as a demonstration of his love to sinners, and their ingratitude to him, the white vesture in which he is clothed is "dipt in blood," and inscribed in large and bloody characters, "THE WORD OF GOD."

To show how highly he is exalted, "thousand thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him, while "the armies of heaven follow him upon white horses, clothed, (for all the inhabitants of heaven are pure and spotless,) in fine linen, white and clean." And to manifest his inexorable justice and fierce wrath, "his throne is like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire; a fiery stream issues and comes forth from before him," and "out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he may smite" the ungodly, whom "he shall rule with a rod of iron," and tread down in "the fierceness and

wrath of Almighty God.” And, in fine, to the everlasting confusion of his adversaries, and the perpetual joy of his redeemed, “he hath on his vesture, and on his thigh, a name written, **KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.**”

Now before the Son of Man, thus appearing in his glory, and “all his holy angels with him,” being seated upon the throne of his glory, are “gathered all nations,” the whole human race, all the posterity of Adam, all that have ever breathed the vital air, that have ever inhabited this spacious globe. And ah!

“How vast the concourse! Not in number more
The waves that break on the resounding shore,
The leaves that tremble in the shady grove,
The lamps that gild the spangled vaults above!”

Such a large and promiscuous assembly never met before, and shall never meet again! Here the monarch and the slave, the prince and the beggar, the courtier and the clown, the philosopher and the peasant, are upon a level, herded together in one undistinguished mass; but not the *believer* and the *infidel*, the *saint* and the *sinner*. No; these are now at least distinguished, and “separated the one from the other, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats;” the righteous are placed on the Judge’s right hand, and the wicked on his left. And now ye may “turn and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”

Observe the different appearance of these divided assemblies! See on the left

“How weak, how pale, how haggard, how obscene,
What more than death in every face and mien!”

With what distress, and glarings of affright,
 They shock the heart, and turn away the sight?"

Each gesture mourns, each look is black with care,
 And every groan is loaden with despair.

Do you ask the reason of this confusion and dismay? It is plain; for now "the books are opened;" the book of God's holy law, the book of the sinner's conscience, and the book of Divine omniscience; and thus every secret thing is brought to light. "There was nothing covered which is not (now) revealed, neither hid which is not known;" revealed and known to an assembled world of angels and of men! "Every work is brought into judgment, with every secret thing," especially the evil works and secret wickedness of the impenitent and unbelieving, whom divine and inexorable justice now recompenses according to their deserts.

But He, the universal Judge, who is all justice, and wrath, and fury, to impenitent transgressors, hypocrites, and backsliders, is all benevolence and love towards his obedient people; yea, he is the Bridegroom of their souls, to whom they were long ago "betrothed in righteousness," whom they most fervently love, and by whom they are most tenderly, nay, infinitely, beloved. And though he left them for a season, and went "to prepare a place for them," yet now he is returned "to receive them to himself, that where he is they may be also." Wherefore their hearts do "rejoice, and their joy no man shall take from them."

"Mark on the right, how amiable a grace!
 Their Maker's image fresh in ev'ry face!
 What purple bloom my ravish'd soul admires,
 And their eyes sparkling with immortal fires?"

Triumphant beauty! charms that rise above
This world; and in bless'd angels kindle love!"

How do their souls swell with rapturous gratitude, and overflow with unbounded joy, while, with looks of complacency and delight, their heavenly Bridegroom graciously invites the objects of his love, whom he acquits and confesses before an assembled world, to share his unsearchable riches and exalted dignity. saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And now a voice is heard to come forth from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him both small and great;" and there is "heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her is granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, white and clean, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

Thus, the bride being ready, and the nuptials solemnized before angels and men, they "go in with him to the marriage." The Bridegroom of their souls embraces them in the arms of his love, takes them by the hand, leads them within the gates into the celestial city, conducts them to his royal palace, seats them on thrones of eternal glory, and puts diadems of immortal beauty upon their heads. They sit down with him at his princely table, banquet on his richest dainties, drink the cup of his purest delights, and enjoy the comfort of his infinite and unchangeable love. Their

bodies being made like his glorious body, and their souls renewed in his divine image, they are made the companions of their God and King, who is now their husband and their friend, and are become the objects of his everlasting and ineffable delight. "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

"The everlasting doors
Do now the saints receive,
Above the angel-powers,
In glorious joy to live;
Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in."

But why should I attempt to describe what surpasses, not only all description, but all conception? Why should I labour to tell what "ear hath not heard," to represent what "eye hath not seen," or to paint "what it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive?" Forbear, my tongue, to speak of what is unutterable; my heart, to imagine what is inconceivable! In silence, ponder, my soul; contemplate, and adore! And ye, my friends, be assured, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, for these are the true sayings of God."

Wherefore, leaving the bride, the Lamb's wife, in the possession of her glorious husband, herself possessing his infinite riches, enjoying his celestial pleasures, and sharing his exalted dignity; leaving her to walk in his light, to reign in his smile, to triumph in his love;

and to be ravished with his beauty; descend we to observe, that now “the door is shut,” as an eternal bar of separation between the righteous and the wicked. The various sentence being past, and distinct abodes assigned to the severed throng, “a great gulf is fixed” between saints and sinners, heaven and hell; and “they who would pass” from the latter to the former “cannot,” neither can any, supposing they were so minded, pass from the former to the latter. But “he that is holy” and happy, will be so still; and “he that is filthy” and miserable, must “be filthy” and miserable “still.” The righteous are in no danger of losing their felicity, and the wicked shall not escape their misery. The latter, indeed, will doubtless desire and endeavour to escape, as we read that the foolish virgins “came afterwards, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us;” they will wish and labour to get the sentence reversed, that is gone out against them. But, alas! it will be all in vain; in vain to expect any mitigation of their doom, or so much as a drop of water “to cool their tongue.” The sentence passed upon them shall be executed to the utmost, and as they contemptuously refused mercy, when earnestly and repeatedly urged upon them, no mercy shall now be shown them, but they shall be treated with inexorable justice and deserved wrath.

Thus (to compare great things with small) you have seen a thoughtless and hardened wretch, contrary to the advice of his best and nearest friends, and in contempt of their warnings, exhortations, and prayers, proceed from one degree of impiety and sin to another; from sabbath-breaking to drunkenness, from drunkenness to debauchery, from debauchery to robbery, from robbery to murder. During this course of ungodliness

he is apprehended and tried once and again. The first time he is acquitted, through the skill and address of his advocate; the next time he is condemned, but through the intercession of friends, he obtains the pardon of his sovereign. But he still goes on in sin, impenitent, obstinate, incorrigible. He is apprehended, tried, and condemned once more; and being known to be an old offender, no mercy is expected for him, no mercy is shown him. His sentence is irreversible, and the day of his execution fixed. And now, convinced that he has nothing to hope, and that he is no longer at liberty ungratefully to trample upon the laws of his country, maliciously to injure his fellow creatures, and wantonly to gratify his own vicious inclinations, he suddenly sinks into dejection, instantly falls down upon his knees, lamentably confesses his crime, and importunately, but alas! in vain, asks and entreats for mercy, even of those who cannot grant it. And, though he is assured again and again his petition is fruitless, yet does he still persist to urge it, till the officers, by the judge's command, force him from before the tribunal, and hurry him back to prison, to expect in misery and despair the approaching day of execution! Thus absurd and inconsistent is the conduct of the foolish virgins, as related in our text, and thus ineffectual their last resource; for,

The Judge from within answers and says, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." As if he had said, "I, whose wisdom is as infinite as my power," whose "eyes are as a flame of fire," penetrating into the secrets of all breasts, who "search the hearts and try the reins of the children of men," I know you not as belonging to me." "Ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto

you.” “I know my sheep, and am known of mine.” I am intimately acquainted with them, and they with me, but I know not you. I have no intimacy, or fellowship, with you. I disown and reject you; “verily, verily” I do. I, who am “the Amen, the faithful and true Witness,” declare unto you, “ye shall not taste of my supper.” Yea, “I swear in my wrath, ye shall not enter into my rest;” no, not when

——“You have wept a thousand lives away,
When torment is grown weary of its prey;
When you have rav’d ten thousand years in fire,
Ten thousand thousand.”

Ye shall not then enter into my rest, ye shall not then be released from your infernal prison.

Unhappy wretches! I would have saved you, but you would not. “I stretched out my hands all the day long,” but still you were a “disobedient and gainsaying people.” Often did I invite you, entreat you, urge you, as with sighs, and groans, and tears, to come unto me, assuring you I would not “cast you out.” Nay, I commanded you to come, upon the peril of your eternal damnation. To show you I was in earnest in my desire to save you, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair;” I gave my soul to endure unknown agony, and my body to be rent and torn, bruised and mangled. While I thus courted your love, and bore your sins on the bloody tree, my Father hid his face from me, as your surety, and poured out that fury upon me which was due to your crimes. I felt the effects of his displeasure at sin, while interposing to save you from it; I bore “the chastisement of your peace.” And notwithstanding all I

did, all I suffered, all my gracious invitations, tender expostulations, and solemn warnings; still, you “would not come unto me that you might have life.” But you abused my mercies, disregarded my threatenings, despised my promises, profaned my ordinances, slighted my dying love, and “would not that I should reign over you.”

And now “vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord.” You shall now find that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” For, “if they who despised the law of Moses died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment shall ye be thought worthy who have trodden under foot” my sacred body, “counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace.” I tell you, ye have nothing to expect but judgment without any mixture of mercy, and “fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.” For “a fire is kindled in mine anger, and it shall burn” to the nethermost hell; “it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.” Ungrateful creatures! I paid your debts, bought your peace, ransomed your souls; but ye would not acknowledge your obligations to me, nor receive salvation from me; wherefore I remand you to prison, whence you shall not be released “till you have paid the uttermost farthing.” I “deliver you to the tormentors till you pay all that is due unto me;” till you make satisfaction to my injured attributes, till you do honour to my broken law, till you recompense me for my unspeakable love, and pay me back my infinite sufferings.

Poor bankrupts! your debt is great indeed, and such as you can never pay; yet since ye would not be persuaded, but were determined to abide the consequences,

therefore ye shall try how ye can “bear devouring fire, how ye can dwell with everlasting burnings!” “Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity;” “depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared, (not for you, ye miserable men, but) for the Devil and his angels,” where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” There your misery shall be extreme, as the God you have offended is infinite, and lasting as the days of Eternity! Eternity! Eternity! a miserable Eternity awaits you! You “go away into everlasting punishment,” and “the smoke of your torment ascendeth up for ever and ever!”

Well, my brethren! is it not high time for me to enforce, and you to receive, the exhortation given in our text, “Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” If such is the miserable end of the foolish virgins; if their punishment is extreme, certain, and eternal; if their “judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not;” if the time is near and fast approaching; if “man also knoweth not his time, but as fishes are taken in an evil net, and as birds are caught in a snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them,” if it overtakes them “as a thief in the night,” unexpectedly, and “as pain upon a woman with child,” unavoidably; if it has not yet overtaken you, ye foolish virgins, whether formalists or backsliders, but you are still monuments of God’s sparing mercy, and objects of his love and forbearance. Surely then you will allow me to exhort you to awake to a sense of your danger; know on what a precipice you stand; see the ruin that is hanging over your heads; think on what a slender thread your eternal all depends;

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behold the dreadful gulf which wide opens to devour you; be amazed at your former carelessness; tremble lest the Bridegroom should surprise you while your lamp is out, while you have no oil in your vessel; and make haste to prepare; “watch, and be sober.”

“Haste, haste! *he* lies in wait, lies at the door,
Insidious Death! Should his strong arm arrest,
No composition sets the prisoner free:
Eternity’s inexorable chain
Fast binds, and vengeance claims the full arrears.”

LXXVIII.

JESUS ADVISES HIS DISCIPLES TO WATCH
AND PRAY.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

THESE words of our Lord will probably be better understood, and have the greater influence upon us, if we consider the time and occasion of their being uttered. The “Man of sorrows,” the Redeemer and Saviour of the human race, was now beginning to enter into the deepest scenes of his humiliation and sufferings, and was thus about to give the greatest possible evidence of his love to mankind; that humiliation and those sufferings being sustained for the expiation of their sins, and their reconciliation with God. Having eaten the passover for the last time with his Disciples, instituted the Eucharist as a standing memorial of his

death and sufferings amongst his followers, and addressed to his Father that most solemn of all his prayers, recorded in John xvii.; he “went forth with his Disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden,” at the foot of the mount of Olives, in “a place called Gethsemane,” (a word signifying “the valley of fatness,”) into which he entered with his Disciples. (John xviii. 1.) And he saith unto them, “Sit ye here,” meaning, probably, near the entrance of the garden, “while I go and pray yonder,” in a more retired part. Having but just solemnly warned his Disciples of their approaching trial, in consequence of which they would be led to desert him, (ver 81,) he doubtless intended that they should be employed, as he was, in watchfulness and prayer. “And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,” James and John, who had been witnesses of his transfiguration and glory, and were now to be witnesses of his humiliation and agony, “and began to be sorrowful and very heavy,” (λυπείσθαι και αδημονεῖν,) *to be penetrated with the most exquisite sorrow, and overwhelmed with deep anguish*, probably from the arrows of the Almighty sticking fast in his soul, while “God laid on him the iniquities of us all.” “Then saith he, **My** soul is exceeding sorrowful,” (περιλυπος,) *surrounded with sorrow on every side*, “even unto death.” His sorrow was so great that the infirmity of his human nature must immediately have sunk under it, without some extraordinary relief and support; for which he was about to pray, and for which he wished them to pray, adding, “Tarry ye here, and watch with me.” Had these Disciples done this, they would soon have found a rich equivalent in the eminent improve-

ment of their graces, by this wonderful and edifying sight; for Christ was now sustaining those grievous sorrows in his soul, by which, as well as by dying on the cross, he became a sin-offering, and accomplished the redemption of mankind. “And he went a little further;” Luke says, “he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast,” so that the Apostles could still both see and hear him; “and fell on his face.” It seems he first “kneeled down,” (Luke xxii. 41,) and then, as the ardour of his soul increased, prostrated himself on his face to the ground, “and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible,” if it be consistent with the salvation of the world, “let this cup” of bitterness and terror “pass from me;” accordingly it did pass from him quickly. (Heb. v. 7.) God took away the terror and severity of that inward conflict. “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt;” while his prayer was most fervent, it was accompanied with due expressions of entire resignation to the will of his heavenly Father. “And he cometh unto his disciples;” unto the three from whom he had withdrawn himself a little way, “and findeth them asleep;” notwithstanding the distress they saw him in, and the strict command he had given them to watch. “And he saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” According to Mark, who must be considered as particularly accurate in what relates to Peter, his Gospel being revised by that Apostle, Christ addressed himself especially to Peter, saying, “Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour?” Thou, who so lately boastedst of thy courage and constancy in my service? Doubtless, however, Jesus also addressed the others, (as Matthew signifies,) who had so readily

joined with Peter in his solemn protestation of attachment to him; could ye not perform your resolution, so as, in the season of my extreme distress, to watch one single hour with me? “Watch and pray,” as I must again exhort you with the greatest earnestness, “that ye enter not into temptation;” that ye do not yield and fall by that dangerous temptation which is now approaching, and of which I so lately gave you notice. —

In improving the words of our Lord, I shall consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM THE ADVICE CONTAINED IN OUR TEXT WAS GIVEN.

It was not given to persons ignorant of divine things. Such cannot possibly discern either the nature, necessity, or utility of the duty recommended, or the weight of the motive made use of to enforce it. Our Lord’s Disciples, although still but imperfectly informed concerning the nature of his kingdom, had been long under his instruction. You, my brethren, have long sat under the Gospel, and, surely, cannot be quite ignorant of divine things. — —

It was not given to persons quite careless about spiritual things. Such will never be induced to deny their natural senses, appetites, and passions, their sloth and indolence, and to live a life of watchfulness and prayer. Our Lord’s Disciples certainly had been deeply concerned for their own salvation, and that of others. And may I not presume that many of my present hearers have such a sense of the value and importance of spiritual things, as to be ready to receive advice not agreeable to natural inclination? — —

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It was not addressed to persons who had given up nothing, and had made no sacrifices. Such will never be induced to give up their ease and indulgence, and “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.” Our Lord’s Disciples had “left all to follow him.” And have not some of you? — —

It was not given to persons dead in sin, in impenitence and unbelief, under condemnation and wrath, in alienation from God, in a carnal mind, which is death. Those who do not even live, or are not awake, certainly cannot watch; those who are not convinced of their sins and spiritual wants, surely cannot and will not pray. Christ’s Disciples were “quickened, raised up, and made to sit together in heavenly places” with him. And are not you, whom I now address, some or most of you? Are you not “alive from the dead,” as St. Paul speaks, Rom. vi. 13. — —

It was, therefore, given to those who had a measure of religion, of repentance unto life, of living faith, of hope, of love to God, but whose religion had not yet been much tried. It was, however, now to be tried severely, and that in a way they had not thought of. They were now to be “sifted as wheat.” It was now to be seen whether they really did believe in Jesus, as the Messiah; and could say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed;” “thou hast the words of eternal life;” whether they really did look for eternal life from him, rather than temporal wealth and honour; whether they did really love him better than their honour amongst men, their liberty, their life?—My brethren, we profess religion, and, I hope, possess it; but has our religion been tried? our faith, our hope, our love? It surely will be so, if it has not, and that soon,

and, perhaps, in a way we may not expect.—Let us, therefore, prepare, and attend to,

II. THE ADVICE HERE GIVEN BY OUR WISDOM AND LOVE INCARNATE, BY OUR SOVEREIGN LORD AND FINAL JUDGE.

“Watch and pray.”

“Watch.” Much is spoken of this duty in the Scriptures. Nothing is more frequently recommended, or more earnestly inculcated, either by our Lord or his Apostles. “Watch, therefore,” said Jesus, (Matt. xxiv. 42,) “for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come;” and again, (chap. xxv. 13,) “Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.” Once more, (Mark xiii. 37,) “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.” “Therefore watch,” said St. Paul, (Acts xx. 31,) “and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” In which passages watchfulness is recommended singly.—Often it is recommended in connection with sobriety, as in 1 Thess. v. 6, “Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober;” in 1 Pet. iv. 7, “Be ye sober, and watch unto prayer;” and ch. v. 8, “Be sober, be vigilant,” or watchful.—Sometimes it is joined with faith, and courage, and growth in grace, as in 1 Cor. xvi. 13, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong;” and in Rev. iii. 2, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain.”—But most commonly, as in the text, it is joined with prayer, as in Mark xiii. 33, “Take ye heed

watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is;" in Luke xxi. 36, "Watch ye. therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass;" in 1 Pet. iv. 7, "Watch unto prayer;" in Eph. vi. 18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints;" in Col. iv. 2, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."

The consequences of watching are clearly pointed out in Rev. xvi. 15, "Behold, I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame;" and in Rev. iii. 3; "If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

But what is this watchfulness? what does it imply? In general it implies a wakeful, in opposition to a sleepy, drowsy state of mind; that, instead of being insensible of, unconcerned about, or indolent in the pursuit of spiritual and heavenly things, we have a lively sense of their reality, nature, excellency, necessity, attainableness, be deeply concerned about them, and eager in pursuit of them, and this continually.

More particularly. As this watchfulness is inculcated with respect to the coming of Christ, to make a change in our situation or circumstances, as to chastise, or try, or purge us; probably in a new way, and unexpectedly; to call us hence by death; to judge us at his bar;—so it implies, that we preserve a deep and lively impression of the certainty and consequences of his coming, the uncertainty of the time when he will come;

that we continually look for him;—that we be prepared with “oil in our vessels,” our “lights burning, and our loins girded.” (Luke xii. 35—40.) — —

Watchfulness, sometimes, relates to the work we have to do, and the will of God we are required to fulfil, as in Mark xiii. 34, and Luke xii. 39—48. In this view it implies,—that we be awake to know and consider what that will is, (Hab. ii. 1,) and the work which we have to do;—that we be sensible of its importance; that we be watchful to embrace the most seasonable and proper time to do it. (Matt. xxiv. 45—51.) — —

Watchfulness respects our enemies. (1 Pet. v. 8.) It implies a just consideration, how numerous, subtle, powerful, malicious, and diligent they are,—of the danger we are in from them;—that we keep a good look out, and watch all their motions;—that we stand on our guard, and resist them at their first approach.

As watchfulness stands connected with prayer, it implies,—a wakeful sense of our spiritual wants, and the necessity of obtaining a supply of them;—a sense of the willingness and ability of God to supply them;—a continual expectation and looking for such a supply;—a careful avoiding of whatever would hinder the success of our prayer.

But this may be better understood, while I consider the duty of *prayer*.

Here it must be observed, that being chiefly recommended with a reference to trials and temptations, prayer has its origin in a sense of our own weakness, and utter inability to meet our trials, and “stand in the evil day,” without supernatural aid, without light, power, protection, and preservation from God.

Our desire must be to Him; our expectation must be

from Him; our dependance must be on him. This must be expressed,—mentally—verbally,—privately,—publicly,—earnestly,—importunately,—constantly,—perseveringly,—consistently,—believingly. All this will be illustrated and enforced by considering,

III. THE REASON FOR THIS ADVICE, OR THE MOTIVE BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

“That ye enter not into temptation,” (εις πειρασμον,) *into trial.*

Temptations or trials are of two kinds.

First. Such as are sent for the trial of our grace. Thus the humiliation and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, his being rejected, persecuted, and put to death by the Jews, instead of being welcomed, applauded, and exalted to be their King, as the Disciples expected he would be, was a trial of their *faith* and confidence in him as the Messiah: It was also a trial of their *hope*, showing whether they could still look for victory over death and eternal life, from one that was himself put to death, and for salvation from one that could not, as it appeared, save himself. And, as his Disciples were likely to be treated in the same manner as their Master, this was a trial of their *love*, discovering whether they loved him better than their honour, property, liberty, and life. Other things may try our grace in other respects, as our resignation, patience, contentment, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering; our readiness to forgive; our benevolence and beneficence; our temperance, our charity.—Our graces are thus exercised and improved, as well as tried. — —

Our Lord, however, does not primarily speak of these

trials. For, by the wisdom of God, they are made the portion of all true Christians, who must “take up their cross, and follow Christ,” and “through much tribulation must enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts xiv. 22; 1 Thess. iii. 3; 2 Tim. iii. 12.)—They are sometimes necessary for us. “Now,” says Peter, “for a season, if need be, (εἰ δεὸν εἴη,) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” (1 Pet. i. 6.)—And they are appointed for salutary ends; to make us “partakers of his holiness;” (Heb. xii. 10;) to produce “the peaceable fruit of righteousness;” (ver. 11;) to make us conformed to our head; (Rom. viii. 29;) and hence they are gifts of God. (Phil. i. 29.)—We are, therefore, to “count it all joy, when we fall into divers temptations,” (James i. 2,) and are said to be “blessed,” when we “endure temptation.” (James i. 12; 1 Pet. iv. 14.) Hence the primitive believers rejoiced in them. (Rom. v. 3.)

But although these kind of trials are not primarily meant in this passage, yet we may, and ought to pray, that we may not be exposed to such circumstances of difficulty, or to such scenes of trial; as God foresees will be too great for our weakness to endure, and may occasion our “making shipwreck of faith.” Thus St. Paul sent to know the faith of the Thessalonians, “lest the tempter had tempted them, and his labour” amongst them should have been “in vain.” (1 Thess. iii. 5: see also Luke viii. 13; and Rev. iii. 10.) And St. Peter mentions (1 Epist. iv. 12) the “fiery trial,” (πυρωσὶς πρὸς πειρασμόν,) which made so many Jewish Christians fall from the faith. In this sense, our Lord “suffered being tried,” that he might “succour them that are tried.” (Heb. ii. 18.) Now, as God often suffers peculiar scenes of trial to come upon us as a chastisement of our un-

watchfulness, and neglect of prayer, and to teach us our own weakness, therefore we should watch and pray that this may not be the case, and that he would “not suffer us to be tried above what we are able to bear;” (1 Cor. x. 13;) that he would strengthen our faith, and keep us in the hour of temptation. (Eph. vi. 13—16; Rev. iii. 10.)

But, *secondly*, The temptations here meant are such as lead to sin, as those of Satan suggesting evil thoughts and imaginations, exciting those desires, passions, or fleshly lusts by which we may be “drawn away and enticed.” (Jam. i. 14.) Now we are not authorized to pray that we may not be tempted even in this sense; for we shall be always liable to be thus tempted. While we carry flesh about us, it will “lust against the Spirit,” (Gal. v. 17,) and our life must be a warfare against Satan, (Eph. vi. 12,) the world, (1 John ii. 15; v. 4, 5,) and the flesh, (1 Pet. ii. 11.) But there may be cases in which we may be more than ordinarily solicited to sin, as was Joseph by his mistress, (Gen. xxxix. 7,) our Saviour by Satan. (Matt. iv. 1.)

The peculiar circumstances in which we may be placed may give the enemy great advantage against us, or afford extraordinary facility and inducement to indulge our easily besetting sin. Of cases like this the Apostle speaks, when he exhorts the Galatian believers, “if any man be overtaken in a fault, to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering themselves, lest they also should be tempted.” (Gal. vi. 1.) And as we may be thus surprised to the commission of sin, as a punishment of our self-confidence, pride, or unwatchfulness, as Peter was, so we should pray,—That God would not expose us to pe-

culiar danger, by removing the restraints he has laid on Satan, who always desires to try his strength upon us, as on Job, and “to sift us as wheat.” (Job i. 21; ii. 3; Luke xxii. 31.) He cannot tempt us at his pleasure, but God is often pleased to take off the restraint which is upon him, as in the case of David, when he was provoked to number the people. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxi. 1, with 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.) The coming of Antichrist is said to be “after the working of Satan.” (2 Thess. ii. 9.) But because this is by God’s permission, to punish such as “received not the love of the truth,” God himself on this account is said to “send them strong delusion to believe a lie.” (Ver. 11, 12.) Thus God, designing to destroy Ahab, permitted Satan to be “a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” (1 Kings xxii. 20.)—That he would not withdraw his grace, without which we cannot repel any temptation, and which he may withdraw to punish our abuse of it. (Matt. xiii. 12; xxv. 29.) Thus when the Gentiles, who in a sense knew God, “glorified him not as God,” but fell into all manner of idolatry, he “gave them up to uncleanness, vile affections, and a reprobate mind.” (Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.) So a physician gives up his patient to do what he will, when he finds he will not follow his prescriptions. Thus the Jews shut their eyes, and “seeing would not see, and hearing would not hear nor understand;” therefore the Gospel was first spoken to them in parables, and then taken from them, and “a spirit of slumber” given them. (Rom. xi. 8.) Thus God is said to have “deceived the people,” (Jer. iv. 10,) because he suffered the false prophets to deceive them, and to have “caused them to err from his ways,” (Isai. lxiii. 17,) although

he had only withdrawn abused grace, and withheld those tokens of his favour by which they were encouraged to fear and serve him.—That he would not place, or leave, us in these circumstances by his Providence, which he foresees will, through our corrupt inclinations, render us subject to peculiar temptations, and disposed to yield to them and fall by them. Thus, through Hazael's being anointed king of Syria, he was at liberty to gratify the ambition and cruelty of his evil nature, in a degree wherein he thought himself previously incapable." (2 Kings viii. 12.) Thus the flight of David and the conspiracy of Absalom gave occasion to Shimei to curse David without fear of punishment. Therefore, David said, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." (2 Sam. xvi. 11.) Now, as we may be placed in such like circumstances, as a just punishment or chastisement for our unwatchfulness and neglect of prayer, it is peculiarly proper that we should be directed to watch and pray, that this may not be the case. — —

But what is meant by entering into temptation? It is to suffer our thoughts to dwell upon the suggestions of Satan, the allurements or terrors of the world, or the lusts of the flesh, so as to yield to, and be overcome, by these things, and to "fall into temptation and a snare." (1 Tim. vi. 9.) Instances we have in Achan. (Josh. vii. 20, 21;) Gehazi; (2 Kings v. 20;) David; (2 Sam. xi. 2;) Peter, who thought on, and feared, sufferings; (Matt. xxvi. 69;) Judas, being tempted by the lure of gain; (Matt. xxvi. 14, 15;) also Ananias, and Sapphira. (Acts v. 1.) Now, as it is always owing to unwatchfulness, and neglect of prayer, when we *thus*

enter into temptation, and are overcome, it is with the utmost propriety our Lord exhorts us in the text.

We see, therefore, from the whole, the vast importance of watching and praying;—without which, we cannot be prepared for such ordinary trials and temptations, as we shall assuredly meet with as men and as Christians, but shall fall by them, bring guilt upon our conscience, dishonour the cause of God, and become stumbling-blocks in the way of others;—without which, also, and to chastise our negligence and disobedience, we shall be exposed to peculiar trials and temptations, which otherwise we might have escaped, and through which, being overcome, we shall certainly suffer great misery in various ways, even in this world, and, perhaps, never “escaping out of the snare of the Devil,” but being thenceforward “led captive at his will,” we shall perish everlastingly. God, who is faithful to his promises, will preserve his people that pray unto him, and “will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able;” but such as through self-confidence, or false security, neglect to “watch and pray,” must inevitably fall, and have no ground of expectation that Divine mercy will prevent them falling irrecoverably.

APPLICATION.

* * * * *

LXXIX.

REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN THE GOSPEL.

MARK I. 15.

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent ye, and believe the Gospel.*

How important are these words! Frequently repeated as they were, by him who “spake as never man spake,” and containing, as they do, the substance of our Lord’s preaching, (compare ver. 14 and the text,) —of that of his forerunner, (ver. 4, Matt. iii. 2,)—and of that of his Apostles, sent out during his life. (Matt. x. 7; Mark vi. 12,) and after his death. (Luke xxiv. 47; Mark xvi. 16; Acts ii. 38; iii. 19; ver. 31; xx. 21; xxviii. 31.) — —

Consider,

I. THE MATTER OF FACT HERE ASSERTED.

The “time is *fulfilled*.”—The time of my kingdom, foretold by patriarchs and prophets. As it had been predicted that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head, and that in the seed of Abraham all the families of the earth should be blessed, so Jacob, Daniel, and Haggai, had fixed the exact time of his advent. (Gen. xlix. 10; Dan. ix. 24; Hag. ii. 7; see also Mal. iii. 1.)—The time of peculiar visitation to the Jewish people, (Luke xix. 41—44,) when God, who before had sent his servants, now sent his Son; (Mark xii. 6;) and,

in a pre-eminent way manifested his mercy and love to them, and afforded them means of salvation, of a most powerful and convincing nature.

“And the kingdom of God is at hand;” (*ἤγγικεν*,) *hath approached*. This expression, “the kingdom of God,” means the Gospel dispensation, (Luke ix. 60; Matt. xxi. 43,) implying,—Clear light in divine things. “The Day-spring from on high hath visited us.” (Luke i. 78.) Former dispensations, as the patriarchal, or Mosaic, with their types and shadows, were inferior to that of the Gospel, as the light of the moon and stars is inferior to that of the rising sun. They afforded only a dim, confused, and imperfect view of spiritual things; of the evil nature, and destructive tendency of sin; of the excellency, necessity, and happy consequences of righteousness; of God, ourselves, a Mediator, the way of salvation, our duty and happiness. This declares and manifests these things clearly and fully, and also “brings life and immortality to light,” and renders such as disregard them inexcusable.—Great grace. It offers a free pardon for the past, a pardon springing from God’s mercy, in a way consistent with his justice. Thus we are encouraged to repent, and since also adequate power is afforded, even the fulness of the Spirit, (John vii. 37, 38,) we are enabled so to do. — —

Under the Gospel dispensation God, in Christ, has begun to rescue men from the dominion of Satan and of sin, of the world and of the flesh, and to constitute them his loyal subjects, and obedient servants; whereby he reigns in them as well as over them, ruling their hearts by his grace, as well as their lives by his laws. —As to individuals, “the kingdom” here intended is that which “is within” men; (Luke xvii. 21;) the king-

dom of grace, which is “righteousness,” internal and external, love to God and all mankind, and obedience flowing therefrom; “peace” with God, and peace of conscience, consequent on a deliverance from the guilt and power of sin; “and joy in the Holy Ghost,” arising from the Holy Spirit’s influences, assuring us of our adoption into the family of God, inspiring us with a lively hope of his glory, (Gal. iv. 6; Rom. v. 2,) and giving us an earnest of our future inheritance in our hearts. (See Rom. xiv. 17.) This kingdom of God, of which believers are possessed on earth, and which is at once a preparation for, and an earnest of, the kingdom of God in heaven, is at hand, at the door of every heart, ready to be set up there. — —

The expression also means the millennial reign of Christ on earth, which is “at hand.” A tradition existed in the Jewish church, as well as in the first ages of Christianity, that the world would last only seven thousand years; two thousand of which were before the law, two thousand under it, and two thousand under the Messiah; after which God shall be exalted by the destruction of his enemies, and cause righteousness to prevail during the seventh millenary.* If regard is to

* See Bishop Newton’s Dissertations, Vol. II. Diss. 25, where he quotes several ancient Jewish and Christian writers. The words of Barnabas, in the first century, in reference to the history of the creation by Moses, are these: “Consider what that signifies, *he finished them in six days*. This it signifies, that the Lord God will finish all things in six thousand years. For a day with him is a thousand years. Therefore, children, in six thousand years shall all things be consummated. *And he rested on the seventh day*: this signifies, that when his Son shall come, and abolish the season of the wicked one, and judge the ungodly, then he shall rest gloriously in that seventh day.” (Barnabas, Epist. Cap. 15.) But the words of Lactantius, on

be had to this tradition, as it respects the commencement of the period when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord," it may certainly be said to be approaching us. And though, after the three first centuries, the opinion we have mentioned was less prevalent, because the doctrine of the millennium itself grew into disrepute, being blended with fables, and many absurd and fanciful representations; yet, very reasonable deductions from the testimony of the Scriptures, afford a strong presumption that the millennial reign of Christ is not far distant. — —

Lastly; the kingdom of glory may be intended in the text. This is "at hand" to the disciple of Christ, who rightly receives the Gospel dispensation, who is a member of the Church militant, and a subject of Christ's spiritual kingdom; for death is at hand; is not far from any of us; our life is a vapour; and at death our state will be unalterably fixed either in the kingdom of God, or that of Belial. — —

II. THE EXHORTATION GROUNDED THEREON.

this subject, at the beginning of the fourth century, are more copious. "Because all the works of God were finished in six days, it is necessary that the world should remain in this state six ages, that is, six thousand years." And "because having finished the works, he rested on the seventh day, and blessed it, it is necessary that, at the end of the sixth thousandth year, all wickedness should be abolished out of the earth, and justice should reign for a thousand years. When the Son of God shall be conversant among men, a thousand years," having restored the just to life, and shall rule them with most just government. — — "And when the thousand years shall be completed, there shall be that second and public resurrection of all men, wherein the unjust shall be raised to everlasting torments.—This is the doctrine of the holy prophets, which we Christians follow." (Cited from the Seventh Book of his Divine Institutions.)

“Repent ye.” The deep importance of repentance is manifest from the warning of our Lord to his hearers, in Luke xiii. 3, 5. On this hinge our salvation turns; for God never pardons the impenitent. As to the nature of repentance; it flows from,—illumination of mind by the Word, especially the law of God, and the Holy Spirit. We must be enlightened as to the purity, spirituality, extent, and obligation, of the law of God, and, examining ourselves by it, we must discover the number of our sins of commission or omission, their great evil and dreadful tendency; we must also be impressed with the shortness of time, and the length and nearness of eternity. Hence there arises in our minds—Conviction of the sinfulness of our practice, and of our nature, the source from which our practice flows; of our guilt, and of our helplessness, inasmuch as we are unable to atone for the guilt, or remove the power of sin.—Humiliation, which implies the thinking very meanly of ourselves, and the being sensible we are not worthy of the good opinion of any one, much less of God’s notice or regard.—Contrition, or godly sorrow, for the dishonour done to God, and the misery brought on ourselves, and, perhaps, on others.—Hatred to sin, because of its intrinsic evil and dreadful tendency.—Fruits worthy of repentance; of which the Apostle informs us, 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.—Hence it appears to be properly termed (*μετανοια*) *a change of mind*, especially if it be mixed with a hope of pardon, or a confidence in a pardoning God; for it is a new state of mind; the understanding being enlightened; the conscience awakened, convicted, and sprinkled; the affections set on right objects; the tempers and dispositions altered. — —

“Believe the Gospel.” This also is absolutely necessary. (Mark xvi. 15, 16; Rom. i. 16.) But what does the Gospel imply?—The Gospel means the history of our Lord Jesus’s incarnation, life, and death. (Mark i. 1; Luke ii. 10.) Tidings of the birth, humiliation, sufferings, and glory of Christ, are “good tidings.” To believe the Gospel in this sense, is the ground of believing it in every other. The foundation then of this faith is,—that our Lord, in his person, undertaking, and the whole process of his life, teaching, miracles, sufferings, death, and resurrection, fulfilled the ancient prophecies, and answered the types of the Old Testament,—that those who bore testimony to his history, confirmed their testimony by a holy life, by miracles, and by prophecies, which were afterwards fulfilled.—The Gospel means that revelation of the divine will, which was published by Christ and his Apostles, including all the doctrines, commands, promises, threatenings, contained in the New Testament. The foundation of faith in it, in this sense, is the internal excellence of these things; their being taught by Him who was the “wisdom” and “word” of God incarnate, “the Amen;” and by the Apostles endued with the Spirit of truth, of power, and love; their being sealed with his blood, confirmed by his resurrection, and by miracles, and prophecies fulfilled, and therefore, being absolutely certain and deeply important. Believing the Gospel, in this sense, implies that these doctrines come to us “not in word only,” but “in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;” (1 Thess. i. 5;) that we comply with its commands, especially with that which enjoins our believing in Jesus, as the term of our salvation; that we “see,” be “persuaded of,”

and “embrace” its promises; (Heb. xi. 13;) that we revere its threatenings. — — The Gospel means the glad tidings of salvation, *viz.*, of light to such as are in darkness, of pardon to the penitent, of the divine favour to the condemned, of grace and holiness to such as are perishing through natural corruption and sin. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isai. lii. 7.) To believe the Gospel in this sense, is to welcome these tidings, to be persuaded they are brought to us, and to embrace them, and the salvation thus announced and offered to us. In this way we enter now into the kingdom of grace, being made members of the Church militant, and subjects of God in Christ, and are entitled to, and progressively prepared for, the kingdom of glory.

III. WHAT WEIGHT THERE IS IN THIS MATTER OF FACT TO ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION.

Is the time of the establishment of the Messiah’s kingdom fulfilled? Then how certainly true, and how deeply important, are the things foretold so long beforehand, and afterwards so punctually fulfilled! How solid a foundation is laid for repentance and faith!

Is the Gospel preached, and does it bring clear light? How inexcusable, then, are the ignorant, impenitent, and unbelieving!

Does the Gospel offer a *free* pardon for all sin? Then what ample encouragement is there for the most abandoned, to repent and turn to God!

Is *great grace* given under the Gospel? The Ethiopian may, therefore, “change his skin, and the leopard his spots;” the most enslaved to sin, and most corrupt in heart, may be renewed.

Is Christ rescuing mankind from the dominion of sin, the world, and Satan? Then will you be rescued? Are not the “other lords” that reign over you, tyrants, and their service bondage?—Is he gathering subjects to himself, and does he reign in and over them? Then will you be gathered to him? Shall he reign in and over you? Is he not your lawful sovereign? Is not “his yoke easy, and his burden light?” “his service perfect freedom?”

Is the kingdom of God “within” us, at hand? at the door? ready to be set up in our hearts! Then will you receive it?—

Is the millennial reign of Christ at hand? Then will you help it forward, and, as it were, anticipate its felicities by his spiritual government and peace in your souls?

Is death and future glory at hand? Therefore, prepare for it by more serious repentance and faith; and see that you be not found in your sins, unpardoned and unsanctified, and, consequently, not “meet for the inheritance” reserved for the saints in heaven.

LXXX.

FAITH IN GOD EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

MARK XI. 22.

Have faith in God.

IN this language does the Lord Jesus exhort and encourage his true disciples, at a time when he was predicting, in a variety of ways, the awful judgments and destructive calamities which were coming on their impenitent countrymen. John the Baptist, who, by a divine commission, had called all descriptions of persons among the Jews to repentance, had assured them that the “axe was laid to the root of the tree.” The Lord Jesus had exhibited their danger in the parable of the fig-tree, planted in the vineyard. (Luke xiii. 6—9.) As the time drew near when he should finish his ministry, and be offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, he was more particular, frequent, and pointed, in his warnings; and this was especially the case during his last visit to Jerusalem, after his entering that city in a form of triumph. The two parables of the Vineyard, (Matt. xxi. 28—32, 33—44,) and that of the King who made a marriage for his son, (Matt. xxii 2—14,) were full to this purpose. Our Lord then (Matt. xxiii.) set their sins before them in plain terms, denounced many woes upon them for their blindness, hypocrisy, and iniquity, and in the twenty-fourth chapter, predicted the destruction of their city, temple, and commonwealth.—

In the paragraph connected with the words before us, their approaching ruin is set forth under a symbolical action. (Ver. 12—14.) “On the morrow, when they were come from Bethany,” where he had lodged, and was returning into the city, “he was hungry;” for, as a man, he was subject to all the innocent infirmities of our nature; “and seeing a fig-tree afar off,” (on the way-side, where any traveller had a right to partake of its fruit,) “having leaves,” from which it might be reasonably inferred, that it also had fruit, for it is well known that the fig-tree puts forth its fruit before its leaves; “he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon; and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves.” It is added, “for the time of figs,” that is, as Bishop Kidder and others justly explain it, *the time of gathering figs* “was not yet.” But this clause must be joined with the words “he came, if haply,” &c., the middle clause being a parenthesis, and be read thus, “he came if haply he might find any thing thereon, for the season of gathering figs was not yet.”* For the Evangelist is not assigning the reason why there were no figs on the tree, but why Jesus expected to find some on it. As the season of gathering figs was not come, and did not arrive till after the Passover, it follows, the fruit had not been taken off the tree; and, as the fig-harvest was near, there was nothing improper in Christ’s then expecting to find fruit on it.

* This trajection is not more extraordinary than that in Mark xvi. 3, 4, where the clause “for it was very great,” viz. the stone at the door of the sepulchre, does not relate to what immediately precedes it, “and when they looked, they saw the stone rolled away;” but to the more remote member of the sentence, “they said, Who shall roll us away the stone?”

“And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.” Origen says, this fig-tree was (*δενδρον τσ λαs*), “a tree representing the people,” on which was pronounced “a curse suitable to their condition.” The fig-tree, with leaves and no fruit, was a fit emblem of the Jewish nation, making a profession of religion, but bearing not the fruits of righteousness. “And the disciples heard it;” they noticed the words of our Lord. (Ver. 20—22.) “And on the (next) morning,” as they were returning to Jerusalem, they were not a little astonished to find the fig-tree, pronounced barren on the preceding night, “dried up from the roots;” quite withered down to the ground and shrunk; a miracle the more extraordinary, because the fig-tree is remarkable for its abundant sap and moisture. Peter, in particular, expressed great surprise, “saying, Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst, is withered away.” But the transaction was intended to show the speedy approach of God’s curse upon the Jewish nation, on account of its unfruitfulness under its peculiar advantages, and like all the rest of our Lord’s miracles, was done with a merciful design to alarm his countrymen, and induce them to repent. The destruction of the swine, and the blasting of this fig-tree, were the only instances of punitive miracles in the whole course of our Saviour’s ministry, and neither of them appear to have been injurious.* — —

The disciples, on this occasion, manifested greater surprise than was consistent with just sentiments of the power and authority of their divine Master; but he,

* See the Author’s Commentary on Matt. viii. 30—32, and Mark xi. 20, 21.

instead of reproving them, embraced this opportunity of exhorting them to exercise greater faith. He “answering, saith unto them; Have faith in God.” Have a firm faith or confidence in the power and faithfulness of God, to enable you to effect what you believe will be for his glory, and the furtherance of the work in which you shall be employed. This has been properly termed the faith of miracles, and it is that kind of faith which is chiefly meant here. But the exhortation is given also to us, and to all the true followers of Jesus to the end of time. We are all exhorted to have a steadfast faith in the power, love, and faithfulness of God; and to be fully persuaded that he will make good all his declarations, and fulfil all his promises in their proper meaning, to all true believers; and this notwithstanding any difficulties, or apparent improbabilities, which may be in the way. And it is on this foundation that we must approach God in prayer, fully expecting, if we ask such things as we are authorised by his word to ask, and are earnest, importunate, and persevering in asking them, that we shall certainly receive what we ask.

Consider we,

I. THE MEANING OF THE PRECEPT; OR THE SENSE IN WHICH WE OUGHT TO HAVE FAITH.

“Have faith in God,” (πισιν Θεου,) *the faith of God*, that which he requires, confers, and approves; the faith of God’s elect. Through the possession of this faith, the first Christians in Judea escaped the general destruction; and it was in consequence of the want of it,

that the body of the Jewish nation perished. "When the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith in the land?" When God destroys nations that have professed Christianity, it is because they apostatize from this faith. (Heb. x. 26; xii. 25; Rom. xi. 20—22.)—As it respects the nature of this faith, it has for its object the being and attributes of God; the Holy Scriptures, and the truths declared in it; Christ and his Gospel; the promises and threatenings thereof. But it is not a mere acknowledgement of the divine attributes, of the truth of the facts and doctrines contained in the word of God, of the divinity, Messiahship, and saving offices of the Redeemer, or, of the certainty and importance of all divine declarations; but such a conviction and persuasion of these things, as produces suitable affections in the heart, and a corresponding behaviour in the life.—As to its effects, it enlightens, quickens, justifies, regenerates, strengthens, conquers, sanctifies, and comforts. This faith is absolutely necessary to salvation. (Mark xvi. 16.) In this respect, therefore, "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith."

But if we do not understand the words in so definite a sense, but receive them as they stand in the ordinary version,* namely, "Have faith in God," we must consider them as directing us, without immediate respect to his revealed will, to have faith in *Him*: not in Satan; not in the world; not in the flesh; not in man, but *in God*. Have faith in his omnipresence; his omniscience; his omnipotence; his supremacy; his immensity; his all-sufficiency; his eternity. In his wisdom to direct in all difficulties; his power to deliver

* This Dr. Campbell prefers, as the Author also in his Commentary.—E.

and protect in all dangers, and to strengthen us in all weaknesses; his mercy to pardon; his justice to render to every man according to his works; his love to design our present and eternal happiness, and to grant every thing necessary in order thereto, having given us Christ. Have faith in him as a Creator, a Preserver, a Benefactor, a Redeemer, a Saviour, a Friend, a Father, a God in covenant.—Have faith in God in all circumstances. Is the nation in danger? the Church of God in a distressed or in a declining state? Is your family in affliction? your circumstances strait and embarrassed? your character undeservedly brought under reproach? Are you suffering in your body? or any near relative? Are you approaching your great change? &c. &c. *Have faith in God.**—This faith can only subsist in poverty of spirit, but it infinitely enriches its possessor. It makes us feel the deadness, the pollution, the nakedness of nature, and applies to Christ to be quickened from death in sin, to be washed, to be clothed in his righteousness, and to be nourished with the bread of heaven. It works in and by prayer. When we pray we must desire what we ask; (ver. 24;) not doubting in our heart (Jam. i. 6,) God's power, or love, or faithfulness; but believing that what we ask shall be given, and what we say shall come to pass; although it be utterly impossible to any one but God, as much so as the blasting a barren fig-tree, or removing a moun-

* Let the Preacher be particular here, and apply God's promises and declarations in each case specified: *e. g.* Are you poor, and in danger of wanting the necessaries of life? *Have faith in God*, that as you have sought "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto you;" that, as you "walk uprightly, the Lord will withhold no good thing" from you.

tain. It must work by love, “without wrath and doubting.” (1 Tim. ii. 8.) We must forgive, if we have “ought against any.” (ver. 25.) — —

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN THESE RESPECTS.

It is infinitely reasonable that we should exercise it, as it has truth and reality for its ground. — —

It is our absolute duty; God having expressly enjoined it: and it is the first of all duties. We cannot do any duty of a religious nature without doing this; for, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” (Rom. xiv. 23; Heb. xi. 6.)

It is our happiness. In every act and exercise of it, it has a direct tendency to promote our peace, security, and comfort. — —

It is our honour and glory. Faith introduces us to the friendship and favour of the greatest of all beings; gives us an interest in his attributes, and unites us to him in the most blessed relations wherein he condescends to enter with his people. (Gal. iii. 26, and Rom. viii. 17.)

Faith in prayer is especially important, because they who thus pray, shall have whatever they ask; (ver. 23;) they shall receive “what things soever they desire,” (ver. 24,) *i. e.* in reality, in promise, or in what is equivalent. Numerous are the instances of this. We see it in David; (2 Sam. xxiv. 17—25; 1 Chron. xxi. 26; Psal. xxvii. 1—7, 13, 14;) in Elijah, with the prophets of Baal; in his praying on Mount Carmel; (1 Kings xviii. ;) in Hezekiah against Sennacherib; (2 Kings xix. 20;) St. Paul; (2 Cor. xii. 7—9;) our Lord in the garden; (Matt. xxvi. 39;) the woman of Canaan; (Matt. xxv.

28;) the importunate widow. (Luke xviii. 3.) But why has faith such a blessing?—It raises us from our fall; it hides pride from man; it exalts Christ; it honours and brings glory to God. (Rom. iv. 20.)

III. HOW THIS FAITH IS TO BE ATTAINED.

As it leads to God, so it comes from God, and is of his operation. (Eph. ii. 8, 9; Col. ii. 12.) — —

It is attained by hearing, reading, and meditating on the word. — —

We have it in answer to prayer. In which duty we both exercise faith when imparted to us, and wait for the communication of this grace. — —

APPLY the subject to—

Unbelievers. Consider the absolute necessity, and great excellency of faith, and seek it in all the means appointed. — —

Weak believers. Pray, “Lord increase our faith.” Remember, trials will occur, under which strong faith will be necessary to support you. — —

Believers. Use your faith; try your power with God; and await that happy period, when this and all other graces shall be consummated in the blissful enjoyment of God, in Jesus Christ,—“in whom, though now ye see him not, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

LXXXI.

THE FIRST GREAT COMMANDMENT.

MARK XII. 29, 30.

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.

“**BE** wise as serpents, and harmless as doves,” was the advice of Jesus Christ to his followers, and what a bright example has he set us in both these particulars, in the former as well as in the latter! As certainly as he was harmless as a dove, even “holy, harmless, and undefiled;” so certainly was he wise as a serpent, but without guile. This appears in many instances, and especially in several recorded in this chapter, in which we are informed of the ensnaring questions put to him, by persons of very different principles and characters, and of his most wise answers to them.

The parable of the Vineyard, (ver. 1—11,) had much exasperated his enemies, in consequence of which “they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people;” hence they left him for the present, and “went their way.” (ver. 12.) But to accomplish their malicious designs they sent certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, in order to ensnare him with a question about paying tribute to Cæsar. (ver. 13—17.)

See Luke xx. 19. Then the Sadducees attempted to perplex him concerning the doctrine of the resurrection. (ver. 18—27.) And a Scribe, who had heard his discourse with them on that subject, asked him another question, with a view to make a further trial of his skill in the sacred volume. He asked, “Which is the first commandment of all,”—the principal, and most necessary to be observed? “Jesus answered;—Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord,” &c.—The passage is a quotation from Deut. vi. 4, and is one which was written by the Jews on their phylacteries, and the door-posts of their houses, and was read by them twice each day.—

Consider,

I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMAND, AND OF OUR ABILITY TO KEEP IT.

This consists in a just and comprehensive knowledge of God, the object to whom the constant bent of all our affections and powers is due.—Particularly his unity; “The Lord our God is one Lord,” one JEHOVAH. Had there been two or many of equal power, and contrary interests, we could not have been reasonably required to love any of them with all our hearts; but our hearts must have been divided between them. In this unity the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit, are included. — —

All possible perfections meet in this one Jehovah. The very name implies self-existence, independence, supremacy, eternity. From these flow other perfections, such as wisdom, power, love, holiness, justice,

truth, mercy. How worthy of all love is an infinitely perfect being! — —

He is in Christ, in all his fulness, and in and through him is “our God.” That he is our God is manifest from the relation in which he stands to us as our Creator, Preserver, Benefactor. — —

When, in consequence of repentance and faith, we are in Christ, he is our reconciled Friend, Father, Husband, our God in covenant. — — “Thou shalt love the Lord *thy* God.”

These four particulars,—the unity of God, his perfections, the relations in which he stands to us, and our reconciliation to him, and being in covenant with him,—constitute the foundation of the command here given.

II. THE MEANING OF THE PRECEPT.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c.”

In general,

This love must be in the *heart*, which it must penetrate and possess. Thus it is distinguished from the feigned love of hypocrites, which is only in word, or in external actions, while the hearts of such persons are possessed by sinful self-love, and love to the world; so that it may be said of them, as God once said of the Israelites, “This people honour me with their lips, but they have removed their heart far from me.”

It must possess the *whole heart*; no partition of it can be allowed among different objects. Thus it is distinguished from the partial love of almost Christians: whose hearts are divided, and as in the Hebrew,

love with *a heart* and *a heart*. Hence they are not steady, but “their goodness is as the morning cloud and early dew which goeth away.” The will must be brought into subjection, and all the affections won over to God. We must love him most cordially, as David did, when he said, (Ps. xviii. 1,) “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” The original (אַרְחֻמִּךָ) implying I will love thee intimately, tenderly, and intensely.

This does not imply that no other love must be in the heart. A man may love his friend, a father his children, a wife her husband; we may in a sense love creatures. But the character of this divine love is,—that it suffers no love to be in the heart contrary to it, as the love of sin, the love of the world, inordinate self-love. For, “no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.” (Matt. vi. 24.) “The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (Jam. iv. 4.)—It suffers no love to be superior to it; none, that is compatible with it to hold the chief place in the heart. The chief place is for God; and to put him in the second place, is to treat him opprobriously.—It suffers no love to hold an equal place with it; for to regard any other object as equal with him, is to insult him. He must fill the throne, and every other love must be subordinate to his love.

The emotions and acts of this love must be, as it were, infinite; without measure, as well as without subordination; without bounds, as well as without partition. And the reason is, that this love must resemble its object, and its object is infinite. This is one

sense of the command. But how can a finite creature perform infinite acts? The emotions of this high and pure love should be extended to the utmost of our power; it should be without coolness, or limit, though directed by knowledge; and when we have stretched our souls to the utmost, we must not be content, but acknowledge we come infinitely short of loving the infinitely perfect and gracious God, as he deserves; we must still be dissatisfied with ourselves, because we do not love him enough, and must still strive to love him more.

This love, which has no bounds itself, must set bounds to every other love. "It must be in the heart," says one, "as the sea among the fountains, streams, and rivers; distributing of its waters to them, but still remaining full and immense; or, as a King among his subjects, collecting in his own person all the honours of his kingdom, but, as the fountain of honours, communicating certain titles to some few individuals." Thus must the love of God be the source from which every other love flows, and every other love must be under the control and command of this. As a prince commands the officers of his army, so must this love govern every other bias and affection of the soul; that is, we must not only refuse to love what God has forbidden, and choose to love what God has allowed, but we must love only what God commands, and in the degree in which he commands. We must fetch the reason of our love to any creature, and of the degree of it, from God's will.

But the precept under consideration inculcates the love of God—*more particularly*. All the powers of soul and body must be employed and engrossed by it.—

“Thou shalt love the Lord—with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”

“With all thy soul.” This includes the will and affections.—We must love him with our will, choosing his favour and image, and fellowship with him, as the chief good, and the most necessary requisite for our happiness in both worlds; resolving firmly to prosecute and adhere to this choice; cleaving to him with all the soul, as our life; resigning our will to him, that he may dispose of us, and all we have, as he pleases.—We must love him with our *affections*, taking care that these go out after him, and embrace him. Love him with *desire*; which implies aversion to, and a renunciation of every thing that would prevent our enjoying him: with *hope*; making him the grand object as well as foundation of our hope; this implies that we fear those things which would grieve him, and so hinder our attaining the object of our hope: with *joy*; making him the grand cause and source of it, and feeling sorrow that we did not discover, and apply sooner to this “Fountain of living waters.”

“With all thy mind,” or “understanding.” (Ver. 33.) This implies that we consider his being and perfections, his works and dispensations, as the most worthy, instructive, ennobling, purifying, and consoling objects upon which to employ our understanding.—That we dedicate our understanding to the contemplation thereof.—Hence, that we esteem him, admire, praise, prefer him infinitely above, and exalt him beyond all his creatures.

“With all thy strength;” (*ισχυος*,) *ability*; “with all thy ability.” This implies the utmost exertion of the above mentioned powers.—That, in consequence of

the most deep and affecting concern for his glory, we dedicate wholly to that end all our powers, and employ them all fully for that purpose. In other words, that we serve him to the utmost of our power by the use of our faculties, members, talents, and time; all which must be employed in his service, and for his glory. — —

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS COMMAND.

It is “the first of all the commandments;” (ver. 29;) the “first and great commandment;” (Matt. xxii. 38;) “the weighty matter of the law.” (Matt. xxiii. 23; Luke xi. 42.)

This is, in several respects, the most important commandment.—In respect of the nature of the thing required. Love is the greatest thing God can require, or we can give; the greatest thing any rational creature can do for the glory of his Creator. It speaks, not in word but in deed, our sense of his infinite perfection and goodness; his loveliness and loving-kindness.—Hereby God reigns over us in a manner the most worthy of himself.—In respect of the explicit and solemn manner in which the Legislator has required it, both in the Old and New Testament.—In respect of its comprehending in it, or drawing after it, every other command, every grace, virtue, and duty. Secure the fountain, and you secure the streams; let the root and stock of the tree be yours, and yours are all the branches.—In respect of its giving an excellency and value to every other duty which we can fulfil.

This commandment is the *first* in the order of nature, and according to the law, which considered man as innocent: but to a fallen creature, repentance and faith precede it. — —

APPLICATION.

Have you not all broke this command? Acknowledge, therefore, that you are guilty, and helpless, and have need of the salvation which is in Christ.

According to the covenant of grace, this command is made a promise. (Deut. xxx. 6.) — — Seek its accomplishment by faith in Christ Jesus.—Meditate on the great and many discoveries which God has made of his love, particularly in your redemption. His love, laid to heart, will produce love to him,—and being cherished by exercise and communion with him, will increase and be confirmed. Thus he, who “keepeth his covenant and mercy to them that love him,” will himself love us, &c. (See Psal. cxlv. 20; Prov. viii. 17; Rom. viii. 28; 1 Cor. ii. 9; and Jam. i. 12.)

LXXXII.**THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT.**

MARK XII. 31.

The second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

THE Jews, instead of seeking to get the commandments written on their hearts, were only eager to have them written upon the borders of their garments, their door posts, and the most conspicuous parts of their houses, that they might make a show of regard and at-

tachment to them. And, instead of striving by the grace of God, grace, which would not have been withheld even under that imperfect dispensation,—to pay a due respect to them all by keeping them, they were continually disputing one with another, which of them was the greatest. Some affirmed that the first command of the decalogue, being a prohibition of idolatry, was the greatest. Others contended that the fourth, concerning the Sabbath, was the greatest. Others again disputed in favour of other precepts. In the mean time, as to *doing* the things commanded, at least from a proper principle, and in a proper spirit, to this they were backward enough.

As this was the case with respect to all the commands, none of which they kept aright, the source of all true and acceptable obedience, which is love, being absent, Jesus bearing witness that they “had not the love of God in them,” (John v. 42,)—so it was especially the case in regard to their duty to their neighbour; for they were particularly deficient in truth, justice, and mercy, even to one another, and much more to the Samaritans, and persons of other nations.

Our Lord well knew this, and, therefore, when questioned by the scribe, probably from a principle of mere curiosity, concerning the first and great commandment, he not only answered that question, and answered it in such a manner as to comprehend and show the importance of all the commandments, which respect our duty to God, and to lay a foundation for keeping them all; but likewise added a just and emphatical recommendation of our duty to our neighbour in another short precept, quoted also from the Books of Moses, and comprehending all the commandments of the second table.

“And the second,” said he “is like,—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Let us notice,

I. WHOM WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY OUR NEIGHBOUR.

This is a needful inquiry. In the passage from whence the precept is quoted, it seems to mean a man of the Jewish religion. And in Lev. xix. 18, the “children of thy people,” and, “thy neighbour,” seem to be expressions of the same extent. It is indeed commanded in the same chapter, “The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.” (Ver. 34.) But the Jews understood this only of such as became proselytes of righteousness, that is, who submitted voluntarily to their law, and were thus made members of their church and community.

The Jews thought God had confined his love to their nation, and, therefore, looked with scorn upon the Gentiles; they did not indeed forbid intercourse with them for commercial purposes, or worldly business, but all intimate converse, and eating with them. Great prejudice on this point remained in Christ’s disciples, after his ascension and the day of Pentecost. Peter spoke the sense of the Jewish nation, when he said, “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man, that is a Jew, to keep company, or come unto one of another nation.” (Acts x. 28; see also chap. xi. 2, 3.) How exceedingly were the believing Jews alarmed, when they first heard that Peter had admitted Cornelius and his friends, uncircumcised Gentiles, to christian baptism.

and church communion, without being required to receive the rite of circumcision, and to observe the Mosaic law! The Jews carried their prejudices so far as to deny the common offices of humanity, and think themselves under no obligation to perform them, to those who were not of their own nation. The Gentiles, in their turn, held the Jews in equal contempt, as appears by many passages in the Latin poets.

The cause of this narrowness of sentiment among the Jews was, that God had singled them out from among other nations, and taken them to be his peculiar people; had given them his laws; and they considered these laws, even such as were of a moral nature, as belonging only to their own community, and to be observed towards one another.

Christ, however, has extended the objects to whom our love is due, to all mankind, as appears from Luke x. 50—57; where he quotes this precept again, and shows who is our neighbour, in the parable of the good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite might excuse themselves by saying, that they were not sure that the unfortunate man was a Jew. But the Samaritan is touched with the sight of a man in distress, simply, without inquiring who or what he was.

It follows that not only a relative, friend, benefactor, one that dwells near us, one of our own community or opinion, a good man, or one of the same nation; but a stranger, a foreigner, a heretic, a sinner, nay, an enemy, a Samaritan, is a neighbour.

We are all the creatures of one Creator, possessed of the same nature, having souls rational, and bodies immortal, all of one blood, branches from one stock, streams from one fountain, all equally corrupt, and in

this respect nearly related, all objects of redemption, and equally invited to share in the same blessings of grace and glory. — —

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR.

The expression comprehends all the duties of the second table, all the duties we owe to the rest of mankind, and not love alone. (See Lev. xix. 18, 34.) And so the Apostle understands it. (Rom. xiii. 8, 9; Gal. v. 14.) And indeed the Scripture, by the love to man which it so highly recommends, means not a barren principle, but a disposition of mind bringing forth the proper fruit. This love, therefore, “is such a value for our neighbour, on account of the rational nature which he possesses in common with ourselves, as disposes us not only to afford him all his just rights, and to do him no harm, but on the other hand to have a hearty good-will to him, and to express it in all the proper offices of kindness and beneficence, as we have ability and opportunity.”

If you inquire why the whole of our duty to our neighbour is comprehended in love, I answer,—Because a right temper of mind towards our neighbour, as well as towards God, is essential to our pleasing God, or having any true religion. Inward love to our neighbour is the first thing the spiritual law of God requires, and ill-will and enmity the first transgressions of it. Though these should proceed no further than our heart, and our neighbour should receive no actual injury from them, yet they would make us transgressors before God. If we should be angry without cause, should entertain a secret grudge, or malice, or envy, or contempt; these

things would make us criminal before God. It is in order that we may attend to the principle, as well as the external act, that so much stress is laid upon love, and that our duty is summed up in it.—Because all the particular branches of our duty to our neighbour, will naturally and easily flow from love. The pretence of love, but not love itself, can be separated from the fruits of it. “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” (1 John iii. 18.) The loving man is powerfully constrained by the principle that is in him, and needs no law, save to direct his good intention. From this love flow, *outwardly*, truth, justice, and beneficence; and *inwardly*, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering. — —

III. WHAT IS THE MEASURE PRESCRIBED FOR THIS LOVE.

“As thyself.”

It appears by this, that some kind of self-love is lawful, and even necessary; although being natural to us, it is not commanded. But we are directed how to love ourselves wisely, and for our truest and best interests. All God’s promises and threatenings are appeals to this principle. We ought to love even our bodies, (Eph. v. 29,) much more our souls. (Luke ix. 25.) The meaning, therefore, of the precept, enjoining self-denial, is only that we should deny vicious self-love, and those corrupt inclinations and desires which, if indulged, would lead not to our good, but hurt. This is the self-love censured in 2 Tim. iii. 2.

Self-love then, being properly regulated, we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. This may be consi-

dered as suggesting a reason why we are to love our neighbour. We should consider mankind in general, not as remote from us, or as those in whom we have no concern; but, in a moral sense, as *ourselves*; just as we say of a friend, relation, wife, child; *they are ourselves*. “Jonathan loved David as his own soul.” (1 Sam. xviii. 1.) We must consider others in this light.

To be a little more particular.

As to their *persons*; we must have their welfare at heart, as we have our own, both in body and in soul, and must be ready and active to do what in us lies to promote it.—We must contribute what we can to the health, ease, and comfort of their bodies. “If our enemy even hunger, we must feed him; if he thirst, **give** him drink;” how much more should we show similar kindness to others. (Rom. xii. 20.) We must “love our enemies, and do good to them that hate us,” &c. (Luke vi. 27—36.) We must “deal our bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to our house; when we see the naked, we must cover him, and hide not ourselves from our own flesh.” (Isa. lviii. 7, 10.) We must “do good and communicate, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (Heb. xiii. 16.) “As we have opportunity we must do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith.” (Gal. vi. 10.) We must contribute to the instruction, purification, and comfort of their souls as far as we can. In some respects we must prefer them to ourselves; their spiritual to our own temporal interests; and must, if called to it, even “lay down our lives for the brethren,” and much more, part with our ease, honour, and possessions, to administer assistance to them. —

As to their *character*; we must as readily remark and acknowledge any thing excellent in them as in ourselves, and must as readily excuse, and overlook, and cover from others whatever is weak or blameable; we must also defend their character, as far as we can justly do so when it is defamed, and vindicate their proceedings when misunderstood.

As to their *substance*; we must be tender and tenacious of their rights, as we are of our own, and no more wrong or over-reach them than we would ourselves. But, on the contrary, we must be ready, as far as duty to ourselves and our family will permit, to help and forward, and not obstruct their interest. —

We must feel for their distresses, in any of these respects, as for our own, and be ready to remove them if in our power. This is beautifully exemplified in Job xxxi. 13—22, 29—32. —

We must take pleasure in their prosperity, in soul and body, character and substance. —

As the foundation of all these expressions of love, we must bear as sincere and earnest a good-will to them as to ourselves. —

This, however, does not mean a strict and proper equality.—We are chiefly entrusted with the care of our own souls and bodies, property and character, and here our love must begin. Our regards, in the second place, must be manifested to our own family, our wife, and children; our own relatives more at large; our brethren in Christ, and especially the household of faith. Our benefactors may claim a preference to those who have done us no kindness. We are under certain obligations to love these, which we are not under, at least in the same respects and degree, to love others.

But, setting these aside, we are to love all sincerely, fervently, fruitfully, in all the instances above mentioned.

IV. WHAT ARE THE OBLIGATIONS WHICH WE ARE UNDER, AS CHRISTIANS, TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR AS OURSELVES.

The doctrines of Christianity lay a foundation for this, by representing us all as “of one blood,” originating in one father, Adam; and one Father, God; (Job xxxi. 15, xxxii. 8;) as all involved in like circumstances of distress and danger by the fall.—The good will of God has been manifested towards all, especially in the death of Christ for all. (1 John ii. 2.) Hence, (Acts x. 28,) we must not “call any man common or unclean.” To all are proffered the same blessings of grace and glory. We cannot affirm concerning any that they shall not be saved.

Upon these principles, Christianity expressly commands, and lays the greatest stress on universal love. (1 Thess. iii. 12; iv. 9, 10; Tit. iii. 2; Gal. vi. 10; 1 Tim. ii. 1.) By this Christ’s disciples are to be known. (John xiii. 34, 35; 1 Tim. i. 5; 1 Pet. iv. 8; 1 John iii. 14, 15; iv. 20.)

General love is recommended by the greatest and noblest examples.—God himself is our pattern. He “does not willingly afflict the children of men.” His “mercies are over all his works.” “He spared not his own Son.” (Matt. v. 44, 45; Eph. iv. 32; v. i; 1 John iv. 10, 11.)—The Lord Jesus is our pattern. Mark his pity, kindness, compassion, beneficence, as manifested in his life, death, sufferings; in his forgiving, praying for, and dying for, his enemies. (Phil. ii. 5; 2 Cor. viii.

9; Eph. v. 2.)—The world of love, which, as believers, we have in prospect, should raise our souls to a temper of sincere, fervent, and universal love. —

DIRECTIONS.

Regulate your self-love, as the Gospel commands. —
Guard against selfishness. —

Having justly rectified the love of yourselves, carry the same temper into your behaviour towards all others. — —

LXXXIII.

WATCHFULNESS, A PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST.

MARK XIII. 35, 36.

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

I NAME these words as the subject of a discourse, at this time, because I think nothing happens by chance; that the superintending providence of God is over all things, especially over the death of mankind, and that in a signal manner, when any individuals are suddenly and unexpectedly removed from this world. I think, likewise, that such dispensations are peculiar calls and warnings to the living to “prepare to meet their God;” and that it is the duty of those who “watch for souls,”

to endeavour to improve such events, and thus, in a certain sense, to be “workers together with God.”

The Author, (having here mentioned several instances of sudden death which had recently occurred,) then proceeds to consider,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE COMING OF THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

By “the master of the house,” here, is meant Christ, as it is also in Luke xiii. 25. The world in general, and the visible Church in particular, and especially the spiritual part of it, are his house. (Eph. i. 20—23; Heb. iii. 3—6.)

His coming is represented in Scripture in different lights, and for different purposes.

In this chapter of Mark, and in the 24th chapter of Matthew, and the 21st of St. Luke, he is represented as coming to judge and punish the Jewish nation, his visible Church of old, or his house, for rejecting him. (Deut. xviii. 19, comp. with Acts iii. 23; Heb. xii. 15.)

In other places he is represented as coming to judge all mankind at the last day. (Ver. 24, 26; 2 Pet. iii. 3—12.) —

He is said to come, when he visits in a peculiar way, whether in judgment or mercy, any nation, or church, or any particular member of it. (Rev. ii. 5, 16; iii. 3.)

He comes to each of us at death.—(Rev. i. 18; ii. 25; iii. 11.)

It is this last coming of Christ to which I would especially call your attention. For it is of the greatest importance to us, since—It will separate us from all below, from our occupations, enjoyments, posses-

sions, families, relations, and friends, and even from our own bodies.—It will finish our state of trial, and determine our condition for ever; for, you know, we are here on our trial for eternity.—It will bring us into the unseen and eternal world; a new, untried, unknown state.—It will place us in the presence of God, that we may receive his smile or frown, may enjoy the effects of his favour and friendship, and communications of bliss from him, or feel the effects of his wrath, and find him to be a consuming fire.—It will make a most astonishing change in our circumstances.—It often comes suddenly, and gives no warning. — —

II. WHAT IS THAT WATCHFULNESS WHICH IS RECOMMENDED AS A PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING.

It implies life, spiritual life, in opposition to that sleep of death which is mentioned, Eph. v. 14; which text compare with Eph. ii. 1. — —

It implies a lively sense of the reality and importance of spiritual and eternal things, such as persons awake have of temporal things, the seeing, feeling, tasting them, so to speak, in opposition to that insensibility about them, which is implied in spiritual sleep.

It implies a thoughtfulness, care, and concern about them, in opposition to that thoughtlessness and unconcern about them, which is natural to us. — —

It implies a sense of our danger from our enemies, visible and invisible; from the Devil, the world, persons and things, the flesh, our own hearts, and the standing on our guard, in opposition to security of mind, and foolish peace. — —

It implies activity, and the vigorous exercise of every grace and virtue, as repentance, faith, hope, love, patience, &c., in opposition to indolence and sloth. — —

**III. THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF THIS WATCHFULNESS,
AS A PREPARATION FOR EVERY DISPENSATION OF DIVINE
PROVIDENCE, AND ESPECIALLY FOR DEATH.**

The spiritual life, and lively sense of the things of God, which are comprehended in this watchfulness, form a preparation for every event of Providence, as for temporal losses or gains, honour or dishonour, sickness or health, &c.—We are thus armed against every enemy and assault.—We are fitted for every duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves.—We are also in this way prepared for death.—

Does death separate us from all below? We are prepared to be thus separated, being dead to the world, and our wills being resigned to the will of God. Does it terminate our state of trial? We are prepared to have it terminated. Does it bring us into the invisible world? We are ready for that world; our thoughts and affections have gone before us, and we have made provision, and laid up treasure there. Does it bring us into the presence of God? The watchful are prepared for his presence, having by grace, through faith, ensured his favour, his friendship, his image, an acquaintance and fellowship with him. Does it make an astonishing change in our circumstances? The watchful are prepared for that change, having acquired a meetness for, and an earnest of heaven in their hearts. Does it often come suddenly, and give no warning?

The watchful are habitually expecting it, and therefore are not surprised by its arrival. — —

But very different is the case with the unwatchful.— Suppose them, first, *unconverted* persons. If awakened on the borders of the grave, they are thrown into the greatest confusion and dismay; they are carried away from all those sensual possessions and enjoyments on which they once doted; their state of trial is ended, and they can never afterwards be quickened to spiritual life and renewed in holiness; they awake into a life worse than dying. — — Suppose them *righteous*. By their improvident slumbering they darken their evidences, and render their state uncomfortable; they cannot expect any peculiar support or consolation at a dying hour, or in the time of affliction; they are often left to wrestle with sore temptation; they make dismal work for bitter repentance on a sick and death bed; they have the misery of reflecting that they have omitted many duties to God and man which now can never be performed, have not attained those degrees of holiness they might have attained, and although they do not finally perish, they have deprived themselves of the reward they might have enjoyed. As they bring little glory to God in life, so they do him no honour in their death, and leave little comfort to their friends concerning them. Perhaps they leave them in doubt whether they are saved or lost.

IV HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO TAKE THIS ADVICE, AND TO “WATCH;” AND WHAT ARE THE MEANS LEADING TO THAT END.

We must not presume on a long life, which is a most dangerous temptation, and an abundant source of

unwatchfulness; but we must set before us, and have always in view, the shortness and uncertainty of the present life, and the certainty and nearness of death.—We must remember, that unless we were lords of our own lives, and could appoint the time of our death, we can never be exempt from the duty of a wakeful and active attention to our spiritual and eternal interests.—Those whose constitutions are peculiarly feeble, or whose circumstances or employments expose them to peculiar danger, or who are arrived at old age, should consider themselves as being under especial obligations to be watchful.—We must be particularly on our guard against our own nature, and every person and thing around us, which tends to lull us asleep, and against sensuality and worldly cares. (Luke xxi. 34.)—We must remember that thousands are found sleeping, even thousands of professors, at the coming of their Lord.—We must pray much; a duty frequently inculcated in connection with watchfulness. (Ver. 35: Luke xxi. 36; Eph. vi. 18. — —

LXXXIV.

THE SONG OF THE ANGELS AT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

LUKE II. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.

WE shall not wonder at these joyful acclamations of the heavenly host, or army, of blessed angels, including, perhaps, departed spirits, if we consider the occasion on which they were uttered; an occasion the most important to the glory of God, the happiness of the human race, and, I may probably add, the instruction and improvement of the whole intelligent creation, of any that ever occurred, or will occur, on the theatre of this world, or even in the universe. The occasion to which I refer, as you will readily suppose, is the incarnation of the Messiah, the Son of God; an event which was predicted immediately upon the fall, was exhibited in types and shadows under the Patriarchal and Mosaic Dispensations, and was the grand subject of divine communications and prophecy, from the beginning till the period when it actually took place, in all ages of the Church and of the world.

The language used by the Prophets on this subject is familiar to your ears. The seed of the wo-

man shall bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. iii. 15.) "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. xxii. 18.) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." (Gen. xlix. 10.) "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee." (Deut. xviii. 18.) "A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son." (Isai. vii. 14.) "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots, and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him." (Isai. xi. 1, 2.) "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isai. xl. 3.) "O Zion that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God!" (Ver. 9.) "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold his reward is with him, and his work before him." (Ver. 10.) "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Ver. 11.) "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." (Isai. xlii. 6, 7.) "A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isai. xxxii. 2.) "He shall grow up before Jehovah as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he

bath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (Isai. liii. 2.) "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." (Ver. 10.) "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; and xxxiii. 15, 16.) "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them." (Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24.) "The stone cut out of the mountain without hands, brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold." (Dan. ii. 45.) "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks.—And after threescore and two weeks, shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself." (Dan. ix. 25, 26.) "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," &c. (Micah v. 2—5.) "The Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory." (Hag. ii. 7.) "Behold, the man whose name is The Branch, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule

upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne." (Zech. vi. 12.) "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in!" (Mal. iii. 1.)

Such are some of the many predictions which relate to this event. And some of these Prophets, as if they saw their predictions accomplished, speak of the event as though it had taken place, and declare, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given—" (Isai. ix. 6, 7.) "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." (Psal. ii. 6.) "Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever," (Psal. xlv. 2.) "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." (Psal. cx. 4.)

"When the fulness of time was come for God to send forth his Son," an angel is sent to announce the conception and birth even of his harbinger. (Luke i. 11—17.) And six months after, the same angel, Gabriel, is sent to announce the birth of Christ to the virgin Mary. And when his birth actually took place, "there being in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night, the angel of the Lord, (probably still the same angel, Gabriel,) came upon them," or *stood over them*, "and the glory of the Lord shone round about them;" such a glorious splendour as was used to represent the presence of God;" and they were sore afraid: and the angel said, Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." The design of my appearing is not to occasion terror, but

to announce good tidings, which shall be matter of great joy, not only to you and the Jewish nation in general, but to the whole human race; "For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour." The word signifies—A *deliverer*, as Jesus is, from ignorance and folly, from a state of guilt, condemnation, and wrath; from depravity and weakness, in which all men are involved through the fall of their first parents, and their own actual transgressions; in other words, from sin, and all its consequences;—a *restorer*, even to the favour and image of God, and communion with him, lost by the same fall;—and a *preserver*, namely, of such as perseveringly believe in him "through faith unto" final "salvation;" being "able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." It is added, "who is Christ;" the Messiah, the divinely appointed Prophet, Priest and King, of his people; their "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" and who is sufficiently qualified to sustain these unspeakably important offices and characters, because he is "the Lord;" He is God, as well as man; "God manifest in the flesh;" "the Lord that in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth," &c. (Heb. i. 10,) and without whom "was not any thing made that was made." (John i. 3; Col. i. 16.) The message of the angel seems to refer to Isai. ix. 6. "Unto us a child is born," &c. born in the very place, of the very family, in the manner, and with the circumstances predicted. "And this shall be the sign unto you;" given to confirm your faith; "ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." They might have expected to have found him dressed in splendid robes, lying in state, in the

best house in the town, with a numerous train of attendants. It was, therefore, proper the angel should forewarn them of this circumstance, and make it the particular signal, whereby they should distinguish him.

Now to whom were those tidings declared? Not to Herod and his court; not to the High Priest and Sanhedrim; but to poor and simple shepherds; who were not at rest upon their beds, indulging themselves in sleep and sloth, but enduring hardness and watching over their flocks during night.

To show still more the infinite importance and happy purport of these tidings, and to congratulate mankind on account of them; “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God.” What gratitude and joy these heavenly beings, whether angels or departed spirits, appear to have felt on occasion of this great event! How transported with thankfulness and praise to God, and with pleasure and delight, on a foresight of the happiness which would result from hence to man! The reasons of this were, first, their *love to God*, who, through this wonderful event, was to be glorified in a pre-eminent manner; and, secondly, their *benevolence to man*, who, by this same event, was to be redeemed, and become the subject of eternal salvation.

Now, were they mistaken in this? Did they consider this event as of more consequence to the glory of God, and the happiness of mankind, than it really is? I am persuaded you will neither say nor think so. You will not ascribe either ignorance or enthusiasm to these spiritual beings, to this immense multitude of the heavenly host, any more than to the angels that announced his conception and birth, or to those that ministered to him

in his temptation, or that strengthened him in his agony, or that proclaimed his resurrection, or that accompanied him when he ascended into heaven, or that will attend upon his person, in many thousands, at his second glorious coming. And you, who would hearken to the shouts of a multitude of men; and you, who would attend with reverence and humility if *one* angel spoke, will you be inattentive to many, to myriads of them? especially to myriads so affected and transported with the wonderful fact to which they bear witness, and which they celebrate, not from any sinister motive, but from regard to you and to the rest of mankind, and to God, who is the Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor, both of you and of them?

But what do they say? What is the language they utter on this occasion? "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." The shouts of a multitude are generally broken into short sentences, and are commonly elliptic, something being left out to complete the sense. Such are these. But they are not like the shouts of a multitude of men in other respects, dictated by mere passion, and rashly spoken. Though they express rejoicing acclamation, yet they are the words of wisdom and knowledge, as well as of love and zeal. They contain a doxology, and a gratulation. While these heavenly beings gratefully and affectionately ascribe thanks and praise to God for his marvellous love and unspeakable gift, they congratulate and rejoice with mankind on the happy event. And, at the same time, they intelligently signify, in a few words, the blessed effects produced by this astonishing transaction.

The passage, it is true, according to the reading of some manuscripts, and a different pointing, may be translated, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to men of favour and good-will;" or "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth: Peace, yea, favour toward men;" or again, "The good-will" (or favour now to be shown) "toward men is the glory of God in the highest, and is the peace (or happiness of those that dwell) on earth." This last is an important sense, and what the original will well bear. But the sense which our translators have given of the words, seems to be most according to the Greek, and the best. They imply the following particulars;

**I. THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD BRINGS
"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST."**

On account of the birth of the Messiah, glory, or thanks and praise, should be ascribed to God;—To the Father, for sending his Son,—To the Son, for coming by his own will, as well as that of the Father,—To the Holy Spirit, for revealing the wonderful transaction to the Patriarchs and Prophets, for predicting it by them, and for declaring it by Evangelists and Apostles.

By this event God is glorified, and that as he never was before. All his perfections are exhibited and displayed by it in a most glorious manner, and are seen by angels in a new light. God is glorified, indeed, by all his works,—as by the works of creation; (Rom. i. 20;) his wisdom, power, and goodness, are displayed in every creature, and in every part and power of every creature;—and by the dispensations of Providence, especially his holiness, his justice, his mercy.

his forbearance, his goodness.—But particularly is he glorified in the incarnation of Christ, and the redemption of mankind through him. This the heavenly host celebrate in the most exalted strains. Although these morning-stars sang together and shouted for joy at the creation, yet, as if that work had had no glory in comparison of the glory of redemption that excelleth, they chiefly celebrate the latter. In this are exhibited—The divine knowledge and prescience in foreseeing and foretelling so many particulars, all apparently contingent, concerning the birth, person, life, doctrine, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, offices, and kingdom of the Messiah.—His truth in fulfilling, in their proper time, these predictions, and accomplishing these promises.—His mercy, (Luke i. 78,) compassion, bounty, readiness to forgive, are displayed. His justice had appeared before in the condemnation of the fallen angels; but mercy was still hid in God, until thus revealed in a manner the most attractive and striking.—His justice was also made more conspicuous. (Rom. iii. 25, 26.) “Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other.” Vengeance and compassion, severity and pity, join to ensure the honour due to God, and the deliverance required for man.—His wisdom is discovered in devising such a plan. This was also manifested in all Christ’s discourses and actions; he was the wisdom of God incarnate.—His love in adopting this plan. (1 John iv. 9, 10; John iii. 16.) Love to mankind was uniformly manifested in Christ’s spirit, discourse, and all his actions.—His power in executing this plan, shown in Christ’s miraculous conception, in his miracles, in strengthening him in his agony, in the prodigies at-

tending his death, in his resurrection, in the taking of his human nature into heaven, in the descent of the Spirit and its consequences.—His holiness is displayed. It is the end of our redemption, to make us holy. The tendency of our Saviour's discourses, his conduct and life, were holy.—His forbearance and long-suffering are exercised towards those, who, like the Jews, when the Messiah comes to them as "his own," do not receive him.—All his attributes are here displayed. "Here the whole Deity is known;" Christ was "God manifest in the flesh," and he said truly, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

But though God hath the glory, man hath the benefit. For the birth of Christ,

II. PROCLAIMS AND PRODUCES "PEACE ON EARTH."

Peace implies all good things. "Peace be multiplied." There had been hostility—between man and God. Man's nature is contrary to the nature of God, his will opposed to the will of God, his affections alienated from God, and set upon the world. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and that enmity is manifested in wicked works, (Col. i. 21,) in disobedience to the divine laws, in repining, or want of resignation to the Divine will under suffering, in preferring the creature to the Creator. This discovers enmity against God, and opposition to his law, which requires us to love him with all our heart. Now peace is obtained through the incarnation and mediation of Christ, and by means of repentance and faith in him.—Between man and angels. These blessed and holy spirits could not but side with their Maker against the enemy and

rebel, man. Their nature, choice, intention, affection, conduct, were quite opposite to those of man. Now peace is effected; a communication is opened through Jacob's mysterious ladder, and the angels descend to minister to men, and ascend with messages to heaven, through the Son of man opening this intercourse. (Heb. i. 14.)—Between man and man, Jew and Gentile; between nations, families, and individuals. The history of different nations is a story of perpetual animosities and contests. Particular countries are continually agitated by internal disorder and discord; and the comfort and union of families are frequently interrupted by jealousies and strife. But peace in this respect is obtained through Jesus Christ as far as his Gospel prevails. (James iv. 1; Gal. v. 22—24; Tit. ii. 3—5.)—Between man and himself; the judgment and conscience are at war with the will and affections. The passions and tempers are “like the troubled sea which cannot rest.” “There is no peace to the wicked.” But peace is procured through Christ, in consequence of justification and regeneration, and a hope of eternal life. (Col. iii. 15.)—Between man and all creatures; which, through his transgressions, are armed against him, but which, when he is reconciled through Christ, are all used and employed for his benefit; “all things work together” for his good. — —

III. IT DISPLAYS THE GOOD-WILL, *or*, (εὐδοκία,) *the peculiar favor and complacential regard OF GOD, TOWARDS MEN.*

The incarnation of Christ displays the good-will, the benevolence, the love of God to man, as no other of

his works or dispensations ever did or could do. Though we are naturally in a state of sin and rebellion, and have therefore no right to expect any benefit of God, yet in Christ we are made partakers of his peculiar favour and friendship.—We receive the adoption of sons, and are objects of his parental love and delight.—We are made the spouse of Christ, and have our Maker for our husband.—He lives and walks in us, and takes complacency in us, as in his beloved Son.—This is *good will*, such as shall fill those who are saved with wonder, astonishment, and gratitude, for ever!

INFERENCES.

If the angels, who are not otherwise interested in the incarnation of the Son of God, than as it affords the brightest display of the divine attributes, adore and glorify God on account of it, how should man be affected by this event, for whose salvation and happiness this astonishing interference of divine mercy and love was designed? — —

If we are not conscious of our need of a Saviour to deliver us from sin and its dreadful consequences, to restore us to the lost favour, and likeness, and communion of God, and to preserve us to eternal life; in other words, to give to us the blessings of “peace,” and enrich us with the fruits of the divine “good-will towards man;” how can we justly celebrate the birth of Christ, or feel any real gratitude on its account?—But,

If we have been induced to consider and lay to heart the reasons of Christ’s incarnation, and, in consequence of being “justified by faith” in him, we

“have peace with God,” and as the fruit of his Spirit, “the peace of God ruleth in our hearts,” then these acclamations of the heavenly host will exactly correspond to the feelings of our minds; while meditating on the love of God in the gift of his Son for us, our hearts will be filled with thankfulness, and our lips with praise, and we shall not only join the angels in their thanksgiving to God, but in declaring to others these “good tidings of great joy.” — —

LXXXV.

A KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST THE WAY TO DIE IN PEACE.

LUKE II. 29, 30.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy Salvation.

ALTHOUGH the Church of God among the Jews was fallen very low at the time of the appearance of the harbinger of the Messiah, and of the Messiah himself; yet, it is matter of thankfulness that God had even then his witnesses in that Church; that there were some truly pious persons in Judea, yea, some endowed with a prophetic spirit, and those of both sexes Mary the mother of Jesus, and Joseph her husband, Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, were of this number, and so were two persons named

in this chapter;—Anna, “a prophetess,”—“a widow of about four-score and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayer night and day;” and Simeon, a divinely illuminated and holy man, the author of the words I have just read as my text. A most excellent character is given of him by St. Luke, in a few words, in the verses immediately preceding. “The same man,” says he, “was just and devout;” righteous towards his fellow-creatures, and holy towards God; “waiting for the consolation of Israel;” an expression used at that time for the Messiah, who was to be the everlasting consolation of the Israel of God; “and the Holy Ghost was upon him;” being endued with the spirit of prophecy, which after a suspension of about four hundred years, now began to be restored to the Church. “And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he should see the Lord’s Christ;” God, in reward of his piety, had so favoured him as to assure him by a particular revelation that he should not die till he had seen the Messiah. “And he came by the Spirit,” or, by a secret, but powerful direction and impulse of the Holy Spirit, “into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him after the custom of the law;” just at that juncture of time, when they brought him into the court of Israel, he “took him up in his arms;” discovering him to be the Messiah by the supernatural illumination with which he was favoured; “and blessed God and said,” probably aloud, in the hearing of all the people then present, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” This good old man, having attained his

highest wish on earth, and the fulfilment of the promise which had been given him of seeing the Lord's Anointed before he died, is willing, or rather desirous to depart, forasmuch as the Lord now let him "depart in peace,"* having given him to behold and embrace *his Salvation*. Being well acquainted with the prophetic writings, he knew from them that the Messiah was to be the Author of a great salvation, which, because it had its origin in the wisdom, power, and love of God, Simeon ascribes to him; and because all our salvation is derived from God through his incarnate Son, by whose atonement it is purchased, and through whose mediation, by the agency of his Spirit, it is entirely communicated and applied,—putting the effect for the cause, he terms the Messiah, *God's salvation*. Thus God is called *our defence, our song, our hope*; that is, our defender, the subject of our song, the object of our hope. — —

The words of our text evidently contain the following propositions—

I. THAT ALL PEOPLE NEED THE SALVATION OF GOD.

By the salvation of God, I mean the salvation where-with Christ came to save sinners. (Luke xix. 10; 1 Tim. i. 15.) This is not a temporal but a spiritual salvation; not a future, but a present salvation. (Eph. ii. 8, 9; 2

* Gr. ἀπολυσίς appears to signify, that death is a liberation of the spirit from its previous incarceration in the body. Schleusner interprets the word thus, "libero animum a vinculis corporis, quasi in carcere detentum." He properly adds, "Ex Philosophorum, enim omnium populorum placitis corpus τροπον τινα της ψυχης δεσμωτηριον, habitum fuit." Confer Westenii N. T.—E.

Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 5—7.) It may be considered in three points of view.—As a *deliverance* from spiritual evils, under the power of which we are fallen; from a state of darkness and blindness, ignorance and folly, as to divine things. — — (Comp. Eph. ii. 8, with Eph. v. 8; 1 Pet. ii. 9; Tit. iii. 3—5;) from a state of guilt and condemnation; (Rom. iii. 19—23; Eph. ii. 8, compared with Eph. i. 6, 7; Tit. iii. 7; Rom. iv. 2;) from a state of bondage and slavery to sin; (Rom. vi. 14, 18, 22;) the flesh; (Rom. vi. 6; Gal. v. 24;) the world; (Gal. i. 4; 1 John v. 4;) the Devil; (Eph. ii. 2; 1 Pet. v. 9;) from a state of depravity and weakness; (Tit. iii. 4, 5; Rom. v. 6;) from a state of misery and wretchedness, arising from the fore-mentioned particulars. — — As a *restoration* to the spiritual blessings, lost by the fall, to the true and saving knowledge of God, of which we are naturally destitute; to the peculiar favour and love of God, being by nature and practice “children of wrath;” to the image and likeness of God, being by nature, earthly, sensual, and devilish, and consequently unfit both to glorify God on earth, and to enjoy him in heaven; to communion and fellowship with God, which we have also lost by the fall. — — As a *preservation*, (so the word *σωτηρια* also implies,) namely, of such as have already, through faith, participated in the grace of Christ, unto eternal life. (Jude 24, 25.) — —

II. THAT CHRIST IS THIS SALVATION, OR THE AUTHOR OF IT; AND THAT IT IS PROVIDED IN HIM FOR ALL.

He reveals it; its nature, necessity, excellency, attainableness, and the way of attaining it. This, as a Prophet, he does in and by his doctrine.—

He procures it, as a Priest, by his merits, his obedience unto death, his blood and righteousness, his sacrifice and intercession.—

He confers it as a King, by his power, love, and faithfulness, through his word and Spirit. (Acts v. 31; John x. 28.)—

He leads us from present to future salvation as our example.—

He actually is our salvation when he is made of God to us “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor. i. 30.) As our “wisdom,” he saves us from darkness and folly into the knowledge of God. As our “righteousness,” he saves us from guilt into the favour and love of God. As our “sanctification,” he saves us from bondage into liberty, from depravity into purity. As our “redemption,” he saves us from all the consequences of the fall, even from the infirmities, the afflictions, and the death of the body, and of consequence from all infamy, poverty, and misery, into glory, riches, and felicity, unspeakable and eternal. — —

This salvation is “prepared for all people.” Illumination is free for all. For Christ is said to be the “light of the world.” (John viii. 12.) and his Gospel is commanded to be preached to all.—Justification is free for all. For Christ “gave himself a ransom for all:” (1 Tim. ii. 6:) when all were dead, one died for all; (2 Cor. v. 14;) he “tasted death for every man.” (Heb. ii. 9.)—Sanctification is free for all; for “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” (Tit. ii. 11, 12.)—Eternal life is free for all; for “God so loved the world that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have eternal life." (John iii. 16.)

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III. THAT IT IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO OUR PEACE,
THAT WE SHOULD SEE THIS SALVATION.

In some sense, we must see Christ the author of this salvation. He says by Isaiah, (chap. xlv. 22,) "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." The Baptist says of him, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John i. 29.) And the Apostle, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." (Heb. xii. 2.) We cannot, however, see him with our bodily eyes; in this sense "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John xx. 29; 1 Pet. i. 8.) To see him with their bodily eyes was of little advantage to many that were thus favoured.—We cannot see him with the imagination, or fancy, as some have had, or have thought they have had, visions or representations of Christ made to them.—We must see him with the eye of the understanding. We must know him; he must be revealed to us, and in us. (Matt. xi. 27; Gal. i. 16.) In order to discern any natural object, it is necessary light should be thrown upon it, and that our bodily eye be capable of receiving the image of the object by means of that light. Thus, through the dispensation of the Gospel, "the day-spring from on high hath visited us;" but we must also receive "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, that, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the hope of his calling," &c. (Eph. i. 17, 18.) The

truth hath been declared outwardly, but the Spirit must enlighten us inwardly. Thus must we know him in his person and offices, in his love and sufferings, in his humiliation and exaltation, grace and glory. Hereby we are justified and saved. (Isai. liii. 11; Phil. iii. 10, 11.) For when we know his ability and willingness to save, we apply to him for salvation, trust in him, receive him, and the promises through him. This is the same thing with faith in him, by which we are saved. (Acts xvi. 31; John iii. 16.)

IV. THAT, AS TO SEE THIS SALVATION IS THE GREAT END OF LIFE, AND PRESERVES US FROM THE INORDINATE LOVE OF IT; SO THIS ALONE RECONCILES US TO DEATH, SAVES US FROM THE FEAR OF IT, AND SHOWS IT TO BE DESIRABLE.

This is the great end of life.

Simeon seems to have considered his life only valuable for this end. As soon as this was attained he was willing and desirous to die.—This is the one thing needful for all; it is closely connected with, and absolutely necessary to, our real welfare in soul and body; there is no other way of escaping present or future misery; or of attaining present or future happiness.—We are created and preserved on earth in order to this. The end of our being in the present world, is not to acquire earthly treasure, to attain honour, enjoy pleasure, to eat and drink, to dress and visit, to attend places of amusement, to propagate our species,—a race of mortal, immortal, perhaps miserable beings; but to know and obtain an interest in Christ Jesus and his great salvation. If this be not obtained, better had it

been if we had never been born; but if it be obtained, our birth and life will be an everlasting blessing.—This is especially the end, the sole end of our redemption; (1 John iv. 9; John iii. 16; Luke i. 68;) of the word and ordinances of God, and all the means of grace; of all the visitations of grace in the use of the means. — —

This, and only this, reconciles us to death, and shows it to be desirable.

We cannot die in peace and comfort while we are in spiritual darkness; in that case we know not what will become of us, whether there be a state after death, or what sort of a state it is, or whether we shall be happy or miserable there: nor while we are under condemnation, and exposed to the wrath of God, which is our state till we know Jesus: nor while we are unholy, in which case we are unfit to dwell with God.

But if we are enlightened by the truth and Spirit of Christ, we know that there is another life, a life most blessed and glorious, and that the righteous shall be admitted to it; that in Christ Jesus we are justified and entitled to that life; that we are at least in some measure sanctified in time, and fitted for it; that we have communion with God, and are blessed with a foretaste of it; that we are following Christ in a “patient continuance in well doing,” and therefore are in the way to it. Hence we have peace, hope, joy, and can even triumph, perhaps, in the prospect of dissolution. The death of a person that knows Christ, and has served him in his generation, is a tranquil and peaceable departure from the world; a departure in peace to “the God of peace.” He has found peace with God, (Rom. v. 1,) kept his peace, followed peace, and now he dies in peace! What a happiness that this blessing is free for all!—

APPLY the subject in the way of examination—conviction—encouragement—direction—and exhortation.

LXXXVI.

CHRIST THE PHYSICIAN OF SOULS.

LUKE v. 31.

They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

As GOD, in the course of his wise and powerful providence, frequently educes good out of evil; so it often happens, through his abundant grace, that the folly and wickedness of sinners is made the occasion of calling forth and exercising the virtues and benevolence of the righteous. The displeasure and murmuring of the Scribes and Pharisees, at the kind reception which the Lord Jesus gave to abandoned sinners, on their repentance, was certainly a very great evil; for as it betrayed great ignorance of human nature in general, and of themselves in particular, of God, of his will, and of the errand on which he sent his Son into the world; so it proceeded from, and manifested, a high degree of pride, self-confidence, unmercifulness, and insensibility of the worth of souls. Yet this evil, great as it was, became the occasion of much good. It called into exercise, at sundry times, the unspeakable compassion, tenderness, and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, towards those poor wretches who were thus hated and despised; and to this we are indebted for many of his most gra-

scious and encouraging declarations, discourses, and parables. For the truth of this observation, I might appeal to many passages in the Gospel history, but two may suffice; I refer for the first instance, to the 15th chapter of St. Luke, which contains several parables and declarations, delivered on occasion of the self-righteous murmurings of the Pharisees; and for another instance, to the paragraph from which I take my text.

The fame of Jesus, in consequence of his mighty works, having gone abroad every where, we are told great multitudes came together to hear and be healed by him of their various infirmities. Jesus, however, that he might set an example of devout retirement to his ministers, in the midst of their greatest labours for the good of mankind, “withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed.” But on his return to Capernaum, (Mark ii. 1,) as soon as “it was noised that he was in the house, straightway many were gathered together;”—among these (Luke v. 17) were Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, who sat by, as being more honourable than the bulk of the congregation who stood. They came, it appears, “out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem;” to see the works of Jesus, and scrutinize his pretensions of being a divinely commissioned teacher. “And the power of the Lord was present to heal” the sick who were brought to him. Thus the captious Pharisees had an opportunity, not only of hearing from Christ such awakening discourses as might have converted them to righteousness, but, of witnessing such cures, effected by his miraculous power, as ought to have removed their unbelief. His supernatural power was employed more particu-

larly on this occasion, upon a man afflicted with the palsy, to such a degree that he could neither walk, nor stand, nor move any member of his body, nor utter so much as a word, to signify his desire of relief, but seemed a carcase rather than a man. The miracle wrought upon this miserable object, which was preceded by a most gracious declaration that his sins were forgiven him, Jesus knowing him to be a true penitent, not only filled the people with amazement, but even silenced the murmurings of the Pharisees and Doctors, who, though not convinced of the divine mission of Jesus, were unable to find any fault, and openly confessed they had that day "seen strange things." (Ver. 26.) Jesus, having performed this great miracle, thought it proper to allow the Pharisees and Doctors an opportunity of considering it among themselves and making such observations as they pleased in the hearing of the common people. He, therefore, left the house immediately. But the people, still eager to hear him preach, accompanied him; which good disposition in them, Jesus improved to their advantage. (Mark ii. 13.) When he had made an end of speaking, he passed by the "receipt of custom," or the booth, where the collectors of the tax waited to levy it, possibly from the vessels which used the port of Capernaum. Here he saw a publican, named Matthew, or Levi, whom he ordered to follow him, and who immediately obeyed. Matthew, thinking himself highly honoured by this call, made an entertainment for Jesus and his disciples, inviting also as many of his brother publicans as he could to the feast, wishing the conversation of Christ might prove the means of their conversion. But the Pharisees of Capernaum, who knew both Matthew's

occupation, and the character of his guests, were highly offended, that Jesus, who pretended to be a prophet, should deign to go into the company of such men, so that although they did not direct their discourse to Jesus himself, they openly condemned his conduct by asking his disciples, with an air of insolence,—“Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” This further exhibition of their enmity to our Lord, arising from ignorance and prejudice, gave occasion to his delivering the striking and instructive similitude, which I have chosen as the subject of my present discourse, and from which I shall endeavour to show,—

I. THAT SIN IS A SICKNESS, AND SINNERS ARE DISORDERED PERSONS.

The body is said to be sick, when its natural powers are disordered, so that they do not perform their office at all; or when they are enfeebled, so that they do not perform it with freedom and ease. This may be the case with the stomach, the head, the heart, the nerves, and blood vessels, the lungs, the eyes, ears, or any other part. Hence arises languor, debility, and pain. — —

The soul has also its powers, which by sin are disordered and enfeebled so that they do not perform their office as they should do. We may instance in the understanding, the will, the conscience, the memory, the affections. — —

[Here mention symptoms of bodily and spiritual sickness, and specify the disorders of each, as illustrating one another. See Plan XLVII. Vol. II. page 100.]

II. THAT CHRIST IS THE PHYSICIAN WHO HEALS THIS SICKNESS.

There is no character sustained by Christ which is more suited to our wants, and in which he ought, therefore, to be more dear and desirable to us, than this. He is a King, a Lawgiver, a Judge, but he is, perhaps, in these characters, rather to be dreaded than desired. He is also a Priest, a Prophet, a Friend, a Brother, a Husband, and he must be confessed to be amiable and precious to the awakened sinner, and especially to the true believer, in each of these characters, but in none is he more so than in that of a Physician. None is so desirable to the sick person, not even a brother or a husband, as a physician, especially if he be skilful, honest, compassionate, tender, and assiduous.—

Such is Christ. He is *skilful*; he knows perfectly the disorder to which we are subject, and the remedy, and cannot, like an earthly physician, mistake in either. He is *honest*, and will not trifle with the life or health of his patient. He is *compassionate*; he “is touched with the feeling of our infirmities;” he sympathizes in our pain and distress; he even took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses, and gave his health and life for his patients. He is *tender*; and does not by any painful operation, or bitter medicines, subject us to any unnecessary distress. He is *assiduous*; being diligent in attending upon us, night and day. — —

III. THE MANNER IN WHICH HE BEGINS, ADVANCES, AND PERFECTS THE CURE.

It is done—

By repentance. "I came to call sinners to repentance;" *i. e.* He enlightens and awakens us by his Word and Spirit, to see, feel, and be affected with our diseases, and to desire and long for deliverance from them and health of soul. —

By faith. This implies confidence in his skill, honesty, compassion, tenderness, and assiduity. —

By submitting to his operations, however painful; as the cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye. —

By taking his medicines, however bitter.—As afflictions, losses, reproaches, pain and sickness.—The truths of his word, "He sent his word and healed them." (Ps. cvii. 20.) These truths we must understand, believe, consider, embrace, experience. Thus they will be medicinal, nutritive, and strengthening. By these the understanding is enlightened, the judgment rectified, the conscience informed and awakened, the will guided and subdued, the affections regulated and raised to things above, and the memory replenished and enriched.—His blood. This must be received and applied by faith, whereby we are persuaded of its virtue, and depend wholly upon it. Hence we have freedom from condemnation, and the conscience is healed. (1 Pet. ii. 24; Zech. xiii. 1; 1 John i. 7; Heb. ix. 13, 14; John iii. 14, 15.) Thus the Israelites were healed by looking at the brazen serpent.—His Spirit. This is also received by faith. (Gal. iii. 2; John vii. 37, 38.) This purges away and expels the poison of sin, invigorates and strengthens the powers of the soul; (Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27; Eph. v. 26; Tit. ii. 14; Rom. viii. 2; 2 Cor. iii. 17;) restores our enfeebled and fallen nature, renewing us after the divine image, and investing us with all Chris-

tian graces and virtues; as Naaman was cleansed by washing in Jordan, “and his flesh came again.” (Jer. xxxi. 33; Deut. xxx. 6; Rom. viii. 4; Gal. v. 22; Tit. iii. 6; 2 Pet. i. 4; Eph. iii. 14.)

By carefully shunning those things which brought our disorders upon us;—as the poison of sin, however secretly taken,—the gross and unwholesome food of carnal pleasures, vain honours, unjust gains, trifling, worldly, and unprofitable conversation,—the infected air of carnal connections, intimacies, and friendships.—

By following the directions of our heavenly Physician with regard to,—*diet*; both as to the quality and quantity of it.—*Air*; that it be pure, uncontaminated, free, that we maintain an open intercourse with God and his people by the Holy Ghost.—*Exercise*; walking in the works appointed to exercise our grace. — —

IV THAT ALL HAVE NEED OF HIM, AND MAY APPLY TO HIM WITHOUT FEE OR REWARD.

All have need of him. For all are by nature and practice disordered as above described. Let none of us be ignorant or insensible of this.—None can heal themselves. — —

All may apply to him without fee or reward; without merit or excellency.—Have you applied? What has been your success? Are you healed?—If not, apply without delay, lest sickness and death of body debar you for ever from health of soul, and seal you up in irrecoverable ruin and misery.

LXXXVII.

PRACTICAL RELIGION ONLY REASONABLE
AND BENEFICIAL.

LUKE VI. 46.

*Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things
which I say?*

THERE is nothing to which the professors of Christianity have been more prone, in every age and nation, and of which we, even in this age and nation, are more in danger, than the taking up and resting in a vain profession of the religion of Jesus, while we remain strangers to the experience and practice of it. The understanding, dark as it is, is sooner enlightened, and the judgment, though involved in error and prejudice, is sooner convinced and corrected by the truths of the Gospel, and the evidence whereby they are established, then the will is conquered and brought into subjection to the divine will, the affections engaged for God and his service, and the life regulated and conformed to the example of Christ.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of this, and foresaw it would be the case with his pretended followers, and hence we find numberless cautions on this head throughout the Gospels; hence he delivered his sermon on the Mount, and this upon the plain, in which he repeated many of the most important and remarkable passages contained in the former; and hence, above all, the conclusion of both sermons, in which is declared, in striking

figures, the absurdity and insecurity of every profession which does not influence the conduct.

Consider—

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN CALLING CHRIST, "LORD, LORD."

They that call him "Lord," acknowledge him to be the Christ, the true Messiah, the only-begotten and beloved Son of God, the truth, the wisdom and word of God incarnate, a teacher, (John xiii. 13, 14,) whose doctrine is infallibly true, infinitely momentous, and absolutely necessary to be considered and known by all to whom an opportunity of knowing it is given. (Matt. xvii. 5; Acts iii. 22, 23.)—

They acknowledge him to be their owner, and themselves to be his property; (Acts x. 36;) their Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and, therefore, that he has a right to command and dispose of them, and that they are indispensably obliged to devote themselves to him, to do his will, and be at his disposal. —

They confess him to be their Mediator and Saviour, through whom only they can have access to God, and communion with him, and by whom alone they can be delivered from the guilt and consequences of sin, and entitled to eternal life. —

They confess him to be their Master, whose will they are to do, whose interest they are to promote, and in whose work they are to be employed. (Rom. xiv. 7—9.) —

They acknowledge him to be their King, to whom they are to be subject, whose laws they are to observe,

and for 'whose glory they are to be concerned. (Isai. xxvi. 13; Phil. ii. 10, 11.) —

They confess him to be their Judge, at whose bar they are to stand. (Rom. xiv. 10, 11.) —

II. THE UNREASONABLENESS AND FOLLY, THE SIN AND MISERY OF THOSE WHO, WHILE THEY CALL HIM "LORD," DO NOT THE THINGS WHICH HE SAYS.

Their conduct is *unreasonable*.—To own him as an infallible teacher, who instructs us concerning the way of salvation, and things of infinite and everlasting moment, instructions absolutely necessary to be observed, and not to observe them, is surely unreasonable.—To acknowledge him as their owner, whose they are and whose authority over them is absolute, and yet not to be obedient.—To confess him as their Master, and not to do his will, nor endeavour to promote his interest.—To consider him as their King, and not to be subject to him, but to rebel and fight against him.—To own him as their Judge, and to make no preparation, by obeying his commandments, to sustain our trial before him. (Heb. v. 9; Rev. xxii. 14.)—All this, without a doubt, is unreasonable conduct.

It is *foolish*. What end is answered by calling him "Lord, Lord?" Is God hereby glorified? No; he is dishonoured. Is Christ hereby exalted? No; unless Judas exalted him by saying, "Hail! Master," and kissing him, and then betraying him. Thus he is "wounded in the house of his friends." Are mankind edified by this conduct? No; but the reverse; they are "offended;" some, who but for us would have entered on the ways of God, are hindered from so doing, and others, who

had begun to do so, are turned aside. (Matt. xviii. 6; Rom. xiv. 13.) This is not “letting our light shine before men,” but, as it were, spreading darkness around, that men cannot see the excellency of Christ’s religion. — But are we ourselves advantaged? No; our guilt is in this way increased, our condemnation aggravated, and our everlasting condition rendered more miserable, because we acted so inconsistently and foolishly, when we acknowledged him to be our Lord, and knew his will, and did it not.

It is *sinful and wicked*. Such conduct is perverseness towards Christ as a teacher. It is defrauding and robbing him as a proprietor of all. It is ingratitude to him as a Creator, Benefactor, Redeemer, Mediator, and Saviour. It is disobedience to him as a Master, rebellion against him as a King, contempt of him as a Judge; and all this is united with a pretence of duty and love to him, and is, therefore, manifest insincerity and hypocrisy. —

It is *destructive*, both here and hereafter. (Acts iii. 23; Matt. vii. 21; Luke vi. 49.) Accumulated misery will be the consequence; for “that servant, which knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with *many stripes*.” (Luke xii. 47.) —

III. TO WHOM THIS DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTER IS APPLICABLE.

It is applicable to many amongst us.

We call him “Lord, Lord,” for we have been baptized in his name.—We have confirmed our baptism by our profession of Christianity.—We receive the

Scriptures which declare him to be the "Lord," as given by divine inspiration, and profess to make them the rule of our faith and practice.—We attend his ordinances, assemble with his people, hear his word as his disciples, and even pray to him and praise him. We often, in word, call him "Lord," and "our Lord," and sometimes, perhaps, express confidence in him.—Nay, many of us profess to be his followers, his servants, his subjects. —

And yet we "do not the things which he says."

We do not perhaps take the very first step in religion, and turn to God in true repentance, mourning for our sins, with godly sorrow, hatred of them, and a steadfast resolution to forsake them. — —

We do not bring forth fruit worthy of repentance.

— —

We do not believe in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, as "God manifest in the flesh," as our Teacher, Mediator, Saviour, Lawgiver, Governor, Judge, and do not search the Scriptures in order, by the grace of God, to acquire this faith. — —

We do not sincerely love him, but prefer other things to him, as our own honour, interest and pleasure, to his; are unwilling to take up our cross and follow him "through evil and good report;" are ashamed of him and his Gospel, neglect partaking of the holy Eucharist, though enjoined to "do this in remembrance" of him; and are disobedient to other of his commands. — —

We do not "strive to enter in at the straight gate," but are lukewarm and indolent in the pursuit of eternal things. — —

We do not love God with all our hearts, but our hearts are divided between God and the world. — —

We do not love his children, and, therefore do not unite with them; but stand separate from them, and see them “have need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from them.” (1 John iii. 17.)

We do not love all mankind “as ourselves,” but are selfish, and therefore, perhaps, untrue, unjust, and unmerciful; and thus we cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. — —

We do not love our enemies, and, therefore, are not meek and lowly in heart; but angry, malicious, envious, and “return evil for evil.” —

We do not live a life of prayer, of watchfulness, and of self-denial. — —

We do not “set our affections on things above,” and “lay up treasure in heaven,” but on earth. — —

We do not keep “oil in our vessels,” “our lamps burning,” “our loins girded,” and are not preparing to receive the Lord when he comes. — —

LXXXVIII.

A CAUTION TO HEARERS.

LUKE VIII. 18.

Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.

THIS caution is an inference from the preceding parable of the Sower. — —

In the parallel passage of St. Mark, (iv. 24,) it is, “Take heed *what* ye hear.” We shall explain and enforce the caution in both these senses. —

I. TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR.

This both concerns all Ministers of the Word, and all hearers. —

It is the indispensable duty of Ministers to take heed what they preach.—That their doctrine be *true*, that they may not deceive their hearers.—That it be *important*, that they may not trifle with them.—That it be *suitable* to their state and character, that they may “rightly divide the word of truth, and give to every description of hearers their portion of meat in due season.

Hearers should take heed what they hear. They must not take it for granted that what they hear is *true*, *important*, and *suited to their state and character*; but must bring it to the test of the Holy Scriptures, and examine it thereby. For this purpose they should read the Scriptures, and endeavour to make themselves well acquainted with them, and understand them. And if they find that, according to the divine oracles, the doctrines which they hear answer the above description, they must so “take heed what they hear” as to attend to it, and consider it maturely, that they may thoroughly understand and lay it to heart, and that it may have its designed effect upon their spirit and conduct. —

Our Lord’s caution, however, according to this Evangelist, implied another thing, equally important.

II. TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR.

Take heed, that you do not hear so inattentively, and in such a prayerless state of mind, as not to understand, nor afterwards meditate on the word, and so

receive the seed as by the “way-side.” (Matt. xiii. 19.)—That having heard and understood in a measure what you heard, and being affected thereby, you do not rest in any ineffectual and transient impressions made on your mind, and, therefore, be offended and fall away in time of trial and temptation; but that the truth be deeply fixed in your mind, and that you may have “root in yourself.” (Matt. xiii. 20, 21.)—That you guard against the cares of the world, the love of deceitful riches, the vain pleasures of life, and “desires after other things;” those pernicious weeds, which in so many choke the springing blade, or forming ear, so that no fruit is brought forth to perfection. (Matt. xiii. 22.)

But hear—In *simplicity of intention*, having a single eye to the glory of God and your own salvation, present and eternal.—In *sincerity of heart*, truly and earnestly desiring to discover and put away every error, and every sin, and to know and do the whole will of God.—In *humility*, conscious that you are unworthy to know the great and important things revealed in the Gospel, respecting the will of God, and the way of salvation from such great misery to such great happiness; unworthy that God should speak to you by his Son, and his inspired Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists. We should think ourselves undeserving that a nobleman, still more a king, or an angel, should speak to us; how much more that Christ, or God, should make known to us his will.—Hence you should hear with *reverence*, remembering it is God’s word, and that you are in God’s presence, and under God’s eye.—With *seriousness*, persuaded the truth you hear is no light matter; but for your life, your better and everlasting life. Would you not hear with seriousness the advice of a

skilful physician respecting your health, or of a lawyer concerning your property? And will you not hear with equal, nay with greater seriousness, what concerns you infinitely more?—With deep *attention*; let no sentence, or even word, that is uttered, escape you, and fail not afterwards seriously to consider what you have heard, and to examine yourself thereby.—With *prayer*, while hearing, and before, and after you hear, “for the spirit of wisdom and revelation; (Eph. i. 17;) persuaded “the things of God knoweth no man but by the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 11, 14.)—Hear with *faith*, firmly believing the certainty and importance of what is taught you from the oracles of God, always remembering the “word preached” does not profit those who hear it, in whom it is not “mixed with faith.” (Heb. iv. 2.)—With *love* to the truth, though searching and cutting, though disagreeable to your mind, like a bitter medicine to your taste, or giving pain like a lance which opens an imposthume.—With *meekness*, with a calm, unruffled, peaceful mind, that what you hear, may prove an “ingrafted word, able to save your soul.” (Jam. i. 21.)—Above all, hear with a fixed *resolution*, formed in the strength of grace to be a “doer of the word and not a hearer only,” to practise all you hear, as far as you see it to be agreeable to the word and will of God.—

LXXXIX.

'THE DIGNITY AND HAPPINESS OF OBEDIENT HEARERS.

LUKE VIII. 21.

My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.

ACCORDING to both St. Matthew and St. Luke, our Lord uttered these gracious, and, to his true disciples, most consolatory words, in consequence of his mother and his brethren, (*i. e.* his cousins, the sons of his mother's sister, the wife of Cleopas, or Alpheus,) coming and desiring to speak with him while he was teaching the people. As St. Matthew represents them coming while he was delivering the most solemn warnings against the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; (see Matt. xii. 31—46,) and St. Luke mentions their coming just after our Lord had delivered and explained the parable of the Sower, some are of opinion that they came twice. This might possibly be the case, especially as it does not appear that they had an opportunity of speaking to him on the occasion mentioned by St. Matthew; there being a great multitude of people about him, attending to his doctrine, as, indeed, many were present with him on the occasion mentioned here by St. Luke. In favour of the opinion that they came twice, it may be observed that what St. Matthew records him to have spoken on the occasion of their coming, differs in some measure, at least in words, if not

in sense, from what is recorded by St. Luke, though other circumstances are nearly the same in both accounts. (Compare Matt. xii. 46—50, with Luke viii. 19—21.) Probably, however, as the import of our Lord's words in the two passages is very similar, many of you will be inclined to think the same fact is intended by both the Evangelists, and that these relations of our Lord came to him but once; St. Luke having in this instance, as he has also in many others, contented himself with recording a fact without specifying the exact time in which it took place. Be this as it will, there is not a doubt our Lord actually uttered the important declaration here recorded by St. Luke, in substance, at least, if not in the very expressions here given us; and I now solicit your attention while, from this interesting passage, I consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF ALL CHRIST'S TRUE DISCIPLES.

They "hear the word of God, and do it." On this subject I would observe, that they who seldom or never hear the word of God, show their disregard, (may I not say, contempt?) of him whose word it is. But they who make it a point of conscience to hear the word of God, especially if they do it at all opportunities, do so far show their regard to him and his ordinance, and to the solemn and repeated injunctions he hath given his people to hear it. They show this, I mean, if they are influenced by proper motives; if they go to hear, not to pass away an idle hour, or for amusement, or to gratify their curiosity in hearing a noted preacher, or to criticise and find fault; but to hear what God speaks to

them by his servants, and to learn his will concerning them.

Again. The word of God being given to make men “wise unto salvation,” and being necessary to that end, and a means whereby faith cometh, they who seldom or never hear it, show their disregard of their salvation; but they who embrace all opportunities of hearing it, so far, at least, prove they have a regard for it.

The true disciples of Christ do not content themselves, however, with merely hearing, how often soever they may hear, but they are sensible of the importance of correctly understanding the doctrines of the Gospel. Without which they know hearing would profit them nothing, but rather aggravate their condemnation. (Matt. xiii. 19.) They perceive the importance of being made acquainted, by hearing, with the Holy Scriptures and with all the great truths of Christianity, that they may be “made wise unto salvation.” Therefore,—they hear with great attention and seriousness, knowing the infinite importance of what they hear, and they guard against all wandering thoughts, worldly desires, and cares, as tending to distract the mind, and prevent the word producing its proper effect.—They hear with great reverence both for God and his word; with deep humility before him, and a consciousness of their unworthiness to be made acquainted with his will; with simplicity of mind, in a teachable spirit, and a sincere desire to find out and put away every error and every sin, and to know and fulfil the will of God.—Conscious that the things of God are only to be discerned and relished through the teaching of the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. ii. 11—14,) they hear in a spirit of prayer, that they may

obtain the “spirit of wisdom and revelation.” (Eph. i. 17.)—They “mix faith with what they hear,” as far as they are convinced that what is said is the truth of God, (Heb. iv. 2,) and receive it in love and meekness. (Jam. i. 21.)—They make it their care afterwards to consider very seriously what they have heard, to meditate upon it, and to examine themselves by it.—Hence, by what they hear,—they are enlightened, in the knowledge of themselves, of God, of Christ, of the way of salvation, and the whole will of God concerning them.—They are quickened and made alive to God. (Heb. iv. 12; John vi. 63.) Hereby “repentance unto life,” and “living faith,” are begotten in them, and they are vitally united to Christ, (John xiv. 19,) and possessed of an interest in him.—Hereby they are justified. (John xv. 3.) The word of God is a mean of our justification and of our knowledge of it, the divine declarations and promises being a principal object of justifying faith. (Rom. iv. 24, 25.—Hereby they are regenerated, (Jam. i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23,) and experience not only a relative, but a real, great, and universal change of heart and life.—Hereby they are made free from every kind of bondage, to which they were before subject; (John viii. 32; Rom. viii. 2;) especially that of sin, (Rom. vi. 14,) Satan, (Acts xxvi. 18,) the world, (Gal. i. 4; 1 John v. 4, 5,) the flesh, (Gal. v. 24,) and the fear of death. (Heb. ii. 14.)—Hereby they purify their souls from all corrupt, worldly, and carnal desires and designs, affections, intentions, and dispositions, (1 Pet. i. 22,) unto the “unfeigned love” of God and “the brethren.”—They so hear it, as to feed upon it. It is the food of their souls; milk to nourish, and bread to strengthen, both babes and those of riper age. (1 Pet. ii. 2.) Hereby the spiritual

life is supported, and health and strength increased, and they grow in knowledge, wisdom, and in every grace; in faith, hope, love, in universal holiness, usefulness, and, therefore, in consolation.— Hereby they are fully sanctified, (John xvii. 17,) made perfect, (Heb. vi. 1; 2 Tim. iii. 17,) and “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” — —

Thus they both “hear the word of God and do it,” *i. e.* They comply with it in all respects: they understand, believe, and are properly influenced by its doctrines; are cast into the mould of them. (See Rom. vi. 17. Gr.) — — They obey its precepts, embrace and confide in its promises, revere and stand in awe of its threatenings; the blessed and important truths which it teaches, are marked, learned, digested, and laid to heart; the graces it delineates are experienced and possessed; the privileges it holds forth are enjoyed, and the duties it enjoins are performed. — —

II. THEIR HIGH DIGNITY AND GREAT HAPPINESS.

“My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it:” or, as it is expressed in Matt. xii. 50, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” “A saying,” says one, “which will never be forgotten while there are memories in the world to retain it, or tongues to repeat it.” It is as if he had said, “I regard obedience to God so highly, that I prefer the relation it constitutes, and the union which it begets, to the strongest ties of blood. They who do the will of my Father, have a much greater share of my

esteem, than my kinsmen as such. I love them with an affection tender and steady, like that which subsists between the nearest relations; nay, I reckon them, and them only, my brethren, my sisters, and my mother.”*

Observe then,

Such are regarded and esteemed by the Lord Jesus as his nearest and dearest relations; they are his “mother and his brethren;” not only are they his creatures, rational and immortal, his redeemed, his purchase, his subjects, his servants, but his brethren, his spouse, his members. They bear his name, they manifest his image, and share in his nature. The consequence of which is, that the relation in which they stand to him shall subsist, when all the relations of flesh and blood shall have ceased for ever — —

They are unspeakably dear to him; he loves them above all other men, and it should seem above all angels. He has their welfare infinitely at heart; in all respects he acts as their kinsman, in caring and providing for them; he sympathizes with them in their infirmities and afflictions, and takes a part in their joys and sorrows. — —

He admits them into his presence,—to his table, and the rich provisions of his house,—allows them the nearest access, and the greatest intimacy and familiarity with himself. He converses and corresponds freely with them, and even dwells among them. — —

He is not ashamed of them, although poor and mean in this world. When he died, he left them rich legacies; and does not forget them now he is in his kingdom;

* See Note, Vol. II. page 268.

but defends, supports, directs, and comforts them many ways; sends them many rich presents and donations; will confess them as his friends and relations before all the principalities and powers of the universe, and will at length exalt them to live with him and share in his glory eternally.

INFERENCES.

Inasmuch as the dignity and happiness of those is so great, who hear the word of God and do it, ought we not to examine ourselves narrowly whether we bear that character? Surely we ought. Permit me then to apply what was advanced under the first head, and to inquire, Do you show your regard for God and the salvation of your own souls by hearing his word at all opportunities? Do you hear the word with desire to understand it,—with attention, reverence, humility, simplicity, prayer, and faith? Do you consider what you have heard? Are you thereby enlightened, quickened, justified, regenerated, made free, purified, sanctified? Do you feed upon it? Comply with its directions, experience its graces, rejoice in its privileges, and perform its duties? — —

If as obedient hearers we have the honour and happiness of being Christ's "brethren and mother," then we have great encouragement to apply to him, and confide in him for all we want for our bodies or souls, for time or for eternity?—We have liberty of access to him, and intercourse with him.—We can rely perfectly on him to hear our prayers, to redress our grievances, to succour and support us in our trials and troubles, and make "all things work for our good."—We ought not

to be ashamed of him, but rejoice in such a friend and relation, such a brother.—We should diligently prepare for, and entertain a lively hope of being with him for ever. — —

Further, from the near relation in which we stand to the Lord Jesus, and the regard he has for us, it is easy to infer that we should consider ourselves as being nearly related to each other, and therefore should be very dear to one another. Being the “sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty;” (2 Cor. vi. 18;) and the brethren and sisters of his blessed Son, we are of course brethren and sisters to each other; not only bearing the same common name of *Christian*, but partaking of the same heavenly nature, and manifesting the same divine likeness, as the children of one family generally resemble each other. And our relation to each other, like that in which we stand to the Lord Jesus, shall subsist and be a firm bond of union among us, when all the relations merely human, and all the ties of nature, of civil society and worldly interest, shall have ceased for ever.

Such a consideration as the last mentioned should make us esteem and love each other with “pure hearts fervently,” notwithstanding any little difference of opinion, or mode of worship, or such like circumstances which may have place among us. And we should show how dear we are to each other, in every way in our power, and in particular by our delighting in each other’s company, and being free and familiar with each other, and by cultivating a spirit of sympathy and kind affection towards one another.

We should never be ashamed of each other, however poor or despised in the world, but acknowledge, support, and comfort one another, as children of the same family, and members of the same body; always endeavouring to keep the “unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

XC.

PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER.

LUKE XIV. 16—24.

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many. And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

It may cast some light on this parable to consider the occasion on which it was spoken. Our Lord was now in the house of “one of the chief of the Pharisees.” Here, having cured a man who had a dropsy, (ver. 2—

4,) he gives a lesson of humility to the guests, (ver. 7—11,) and of charity to the master of the house. (ver. 12—14.)

One present hearing these things now observed, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” Perceiving the wisdom and excellence of the advice Christ had given, and despairing to see it practised in the present corrupt state of things, he thus expressed a desire for the kingdom of God, or the Messiah, to take place, when these virtues of humility, condescension, and charity, should flourish in all their glory.

To “eat bread,” is a well known Hebrew phrase for sharing in a repast, whether it be at a common meal or at a sumptuous feast; and the expression, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,” means, Blessed is the man who shall live in the time of the Messiah, and share the entertainments he will prepare for his people; “the kingdom of God” being probably used in this place, according to the sense then received among the Jews, as a glorious temporal dominion. Our Lord then delivered the parable, which has been read to you, to show the person who made the above remark, as well as others, that however great the happiness of those would be who should share the blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom; yet many, who then professed to desire it, were under the force of such carnal prejudices, that though it would be offered to them with every circumstance calculated to recommend it, they would in fact slight, and disdainfully reject it, preferring carnal to spiritual blessings, a kingdom of this world to one connected with another; while, in the mean time, the Gentiles would embrace the Gospel with cheer-

fulness, and thereby be prepared to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the abodes of the blessed. The Parable of the Marriage-Feast, recorded Matt. xxii. 1—14, was evidently spoken with the same view, though on a different occasion.

With respect to this parable, observe,—

I. The rich and abundant provision which God has made in his Gospel for those who will come to his house, or enter the church militant, and become true members of it; *viz.*, by repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For such there is refreshment in the discoveries and promises of the Gospel; (Luke i. 78; Mal. iv. 2;) in its privileges and blessings, such as the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, the favour of God, adoption, regeneration, &c.; (Matt. xi. 28;) in the communications of grace through the Spirit, and the prospects of future glory and felicity. (Isai. lv. 1—6.) In the Gospel, provision is made for the sustenance or support of the divine life in all penitent believers, namely, the blood and righteousness, or the merits of Christ (John vi.) received and fed upon by faith; “this is the bread that came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.” (ver. 50.) Hereby they are preserved in a state of justification and favour; and the influences of the Spirit are afforded which quicken them. These are conveyed in and by the word, which is hence called “spirit and life.”—For the health and strength of the soul; as strength of understanding in the truths revealed, of will in a choice of God, intention to please him, and resolution in his service, of the affections in their vigour and liveliness in divine things; for the spiritual

warfare, for duty, for suffering.—For their nourishment and growth in knowledge, (Jer. iii. 15,) that “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, they may go on to perfection” (Heb. v. 14; vi. 1,) in faith, confidence, and assurance, in love, and all graces, holiness and conformity to God, (1 Pet. ii. 2,) in inclination and ability for usefulness, till they arrive at the measure of Christ’s stature. — —

This provision is a “feast” for the soul of man, that knows its own capacities and powers; for the soul of a sinner that knows its own necessities and miseries; “a feast of fat things.” (Isai. xxv. 6.) — —

It is called a “supper,” because, in those countries, supper was the chief time for feasts and entertainments of all kinds, when the business of the day was finished. The manifestation of Gospel grace to the world was made in the evening of the world’s day, and the fruition of the fulness of that grace in heaven is reserved for the evening of our day.

II. Observe the invitation to partake of this provision. It was general; he “bade many.” The feast was “prepared for all people.” (Isai. xxv. 6.) Mankind had been invited by the works of creation, by the dispensations of God’s providence; by the light of reason and conscience; by the secret influences of the Spirit; and the whole nation of the Jews had been especially and particularly invited by his servants the prophets. It was particular. At the opening of the Gospel dispensation, God sent the harbinger of the Messiah, John the Baptist, the Messiah himself, his Son and servant, with his servants the Apostles, first twelve, and then seventy, who were sent through all parts of the country, during the time of

Christ's personal ministry. And when the Christian mysteries were finished; when sin was expiated by the death of Christ, death overcome by his resurrection, and the truth of the Gospel sealed and confirmed by both; when a way into heaven was opened by his ascension, and the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces, obtained for his followers, by his intercession; when the Gospel church was planted, and this rich provision was ready to be served up on a Gospel table; those who had before been invited, were more closely and earnestly pressed to come in immediately, and partake of the bounty of their great Master. Such was the call given to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea, at and after the day of Pentecost, by the Apostles, and other Christian Ministers; such was that which was afterwards given to the Gentile nations; and such is the call now given to us. Its language is, "all things are now ready;" therefore come to the feast. The full discovery of the Gospel is now made, life and immortality are brought to light, sin is expiated, and the pardon of it is obtained, the favour of God is procured, and the Holy Ghost is given; "now is the accepted time;" it has not been long; it will not be long. It is a season of grace, but will soon be over. Come now to the feast; to come to which, in the Gospel language, is to repent of sin and believe in Christ. Thus John the Baptist, and thus our Lord and his Apostles invited men to the Gospel feast, saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand," (*γγιξε*,) "hath approached," or "is come," "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." — —

III. The invitation was slighted and neglected by those to whom it was first sent. They did not give a

plain and flat denial, they “made excuse,” and that was done by “all with one consent,” instead of coming with one consent to a good supper. This was intended to show the general neglect of the Jewish nation to accept of Christ and his Gospel, and the backwardness of most people, even of those who profess to be members of the visible Church, on this point. They cannot for shame avow their refusal, but they desire to be excused.—Of what nature, then, were their excuses? They were not known and willful sins which they would not part with; but *lawful* things. When the heart is too much set upon them, they often prove fatal hinderances: *licitis perimus omnes*. It is no easy thing to manage our temporal affairs so that they may not divert us from, or hinder us in, the pursuit of things which are spiritual. They were things *trivial*, and *unnecessary*, or which might easily have been done at another time.—An inordinate love to, and intense delight in, our worldly avocations and pursuits, though laudable in their own nature; too great an attachment to our friends and relations, or fear of offending them; these things often both hinder people from embracing the privileges and blessings of the Gospel, and keep them from attending the means of grace. — —

IV. The slighting and neglect of the invitation was laid before the master of the house. Ministers must lay before their Lord their good or bad success.—They must do it now at the throne of grace. If they have good success, and see the fruit of their labour, they must go to God with thanksgivings; and, if they labour in vain, with complaints.—They will do it hereafter at the judgment seat of Christ; there they will be produced as witnesses against those who persist in unbelief

and perish, to prove that they were fairly invited, and as witnesses for those that accept the call; "Behold I and the children whom God hath given me." The Apostle urges this as a reason why the people should submit to those who rule over them in the Lord. "For they watch for your souls as they that must give account." (Heb. xiii. 17.)

V. The resentment of the affront. The ingratitude of those that slight offers of grace and mercy, and the contempt which they put on God, is a very great provocation of him. Mercy abused turns to the greatest wrath. Notice the doom of these men: "none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper." (Ver. 24.) Such was the sentence God passed on those ungrateful Israelites, who despised the land of promise. He "swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest." "Grace despised," says Henry, "is grace forfeited. They that will not have Christ when they may, shall not have him when they would. Even those that were bidden, if they slight the invitation, shall be forbidden. When the door is shut, the foolish virgins will be denied entrance."

VI. Those were commanded to be called, who could not reasonably expect it, and who were evidently unworthy. "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city;" invite not the merchants going from the exchange, or custom-house; the tradesmen closing their shops; they will desire to be excused; one is going to the country house, another to the tavern, &c., but those that will be glad to come; "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." The servants do not ob-

ject, that it will be a disparagement to their master to have such guests; they know his mind, and comply with it. Consequently, publicans and sinners, who are figuratively spoken of under the terms “poor and maimed,” &c., or those literally such, were obedient to the Gospel call, and became members of the Church of Christ, while the Scribes and Pharisees, and such as those with whom Christ was now at dinner, remained disobedient and perished. So it is in the visible Church in our day. — — “Go out into the highways and hedges;” do not confine yourselves to the towns and cities. but go out into the country, and invite beggars on the highways and hedges, those who may be returning from their labour in the fields, and whomsoever you find.—Thus the Apostles and first Preachers of the Gospel, were not to confine their labours to the towns and cities of Judea, but to extend them to all parts of the country, and invite to the Gospel feast persons of all descriptions; or, rather, being rejected by the Jews, they are here commanded to turn, as Paul expresses it, to the Gentiles, and to offer them the blessings of the Gospel, though as unlikely to be called into the Church of Christ, as vagrants in the highways to be invited to a feast at a nobleman’s house.—“Compel them to come in.” This does not imply that any external violence was to be used, but the most powerful persuasion, and earnest entreaties.* The expression appears to imply the great efficacy of the Apostles’ preaching, whereby vast numbers of the idolatrous

* The word *αναγκαστον*, here rendered *compel*, is often used only in a moral sense, as signifying authoritative command and pressing persuasion. For examples, see Matt. xiv. 22; Gal. ii. 14. (Elsner, *Observat. Sacr.*)

Gentiles were prevailed with to embrace the Gospel.— Our Lord also directs his ministering servants to show sinners that it is their indispensable duty, and their greatest interest, to accept the gracious offers of the Gospel; to influence them so to do by a sense of duty, in obedience to God's command, who is their Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, Redeemer, Lawgiver, Governor, and Judge; out of gratitude to God and Christ, for their unspeakable love, for Christ's sufferings and death, whereby this great supper is provided: out of regard to their own interest; they must perish with hunger if they do not partake of it. — —

VII. The provision made for precious souls in the Gospel will appear not to have been made in vain. If some reject, others will thankfully accept it. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength," &c. (Isai. xlix. 5, 6.) God will have a Church in the world. — —

VIII. The greatest sinners are as welcome to come to Christ as the apparently righteous; the poor are as welcome as the rich; those labouring under worldly disadvantages and bodily infirmities, as the contrary; and very frequently the Gospel has the greatest success among those who are the least likely to have the benefit of it. — —

IX. The Ministers of Christ should lose no time; "Go out *quickly*; for all things are now ready." Say to them, "To-day while it is called to-day." Be importunate and earnest with them; compel them to come in. — —

X. Though myriads and millions have been brought in; “yet there is room;” the riches of Christ are unsearchable and inexhaustible; there is enough for all, enough for each, enough for ever. — —

XI. Christ’s house shall at last be filled; He shall complete the number of the elect. — —

XCI.

THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP.

LUKE XIV. 33.

Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

THE Lord Jesus Christ is justly described as “the faithful and true witness.” (Rev. iii. 14.) He certainly was no *deceiver*. He gave no false nor partial account either of his religion, or of the terms and conditions on which men might become his disciples, and be possessed of that religion. He neither misrepresented nor concealed any part of the truth, but declared the whole correctly and fully before his hearers, showing them also the sacrifices they would have to make, and the difficulties and sufferings they would have to encounter, in embracing it. And he was no *flatterer*, by countenancing and excusing the faults or foibles of men, and applauding or magnifying their virtues, real or supposed; but bearing a clear, full, and faithful testimony, both to the truth, and the actual state, and character of men. At a time when great multitudes

of persons were assembled around him, and many of them seemed inclined to become his followers, proposing to themselves, probably, great wealth and temporal advantage under the kingdom of the Messiah, which they thought was about to be erected, he stated the subject of his religion before them, with all its difficulties, saying, "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." He showed them, that if they proposed to be his disciples, it was absolutely necessary they should prefer his service to every thing in the world, and declare by their conduct, that they loved the dearest objects of natural affection less than him. In this and several other passages of scripture, the word *hatred* only signifies an inferior degree of love. Father, and mother, and other near relations, are particularized by our Lord, because, at that time, the profession of the Gospel was likely to set a man at variance with such near relations. "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Crucifixion was a Roman punishment, and every one sentenced to suffer it, was compelled to carry the cross on which he was to be suspended, to the place of execution. The words of Christ, express, that no man can be his disciple, unless he be willing to suffer whatever pain or inconvenience cannot be avoided, except by doing some evil, or omitting some good; yea, unless he be willing to endure the greatest hardships and all sorts of persecutions, not excepting the most shameful death, rather than renounce his religion.—To illustrate farther the necessity of their weighing deliberately, whether they were able and pre-

pared to bear all the losses and persecutions to which a profession of the Gospel would expose them, our Lord desired them to consider how prudence would direct them to act in other cases of importance. The most thoughtless persons, he suggests, (ver. 28—30,) would not resolve on such a matter as the building of a house, without previously calculating the expense, knowing that he who should inconsiderately commence such a work, and be obliged to leave off for want of money, would expose himself to the ridicule of any passenger who should observe his half-finished edifice. In like manner, a king, who declares war without comparing the strength of his forces with those of the enemy, and considering whether by the bravery of his troops, and the conduct of his generals, he will be able to make up for the deficiency of his numbers, is sure to be defeated with disgrace, unless he humbly sue for peace, before the matter come to an engagement. (Ver. 31, 32.)—"So likewise," that is, like the person who "began to build, and was not able to finish;" or, like the king, who, being afraid to face his enemy, sent an embassy and desired terms of peace; "whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath;" who does not engage so earnestly and resolutely in his Christian warfare, as to hold all things cheap in comparison of life eternal, and be ready to forsake them when I call him to it; "cannot be my disciple;" he cannot be acknowledged by me as such; for my disciples will be exposed to such trials and afflictions, that unless they prefer me, and the cause in which I am engaged, to all visible and temporal things whatever, they certainly will not steadily adhere to me, or continue faithful and constant in my service. "Christ does not require

that we should actually renounce these” temporal “things, but that our heart and our affections should be so taken off from them, that we always love them less than we love him, and be always ready to part with them, when we cannot keep them without ‘making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.’”*

But, consider we—

I. WHAT IT IS TO BE A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST.

It is—

To learn of him as a teacher come from God. This implies a conviction of our ignorance and inability to teach ourselves, and our need of divine teaching; that Christ is an infallible and divinely commissioned teacher; that we be willing and desirous to be taught of him, and seek to be so taught in his own way; viz by his word and Spirit, (John viii. 31, 32,) hearing, reading, meditation, and prayer. — — To apply to him, and rely on him, as a Mediator, for reconciliation with God; trusting in his sacrifice and intercession, under a conviction of our sinfulness, guilt, and desert of condemnation; and entirely renouncing every other dependence. — — To come to, and trust in him, as a Saviour, not only from the guilt, but also from the power and pollution of sin and all its consequences, into the favour of God, his image, and communion with him; and this under a conviction of our being lost sinners, till we are saved by him. (Matt. xviii. 14; Luke xix. 10.)— To be subjects, loyal and obedient to him as a King and Governor, renouncing other lords, looking for deliverance, protection, peace, and prosperity, both tem-

* Whitby; as Baxter and Macknight also explain the words.

poral and spiritual, from him; observing his laws, submitting ourselves to his sway, and aiming and endeavouring to promote his glory.—To imitate him as an example. (Ver. 27; chap. ix. 23; John xii. 26.) — —

II. HOW FAR WE MAY APPROACH TO THIS CHARACTER, AND YET FALL SHORT OF IT.

We may go as far as the young man (Mark x. 17—22) who came “running” to our Lord, and, kneeling, inquired “what he should do to obtain eternal life?” but when he was informed what he lacked, “went away grieved.”—As far as the foolish virgins, who took up the lamp of profession, united themselves to the wise virgins, expected, and professed to prepare for the coming of the bridegroom, had their lamps lighted, but took no oil with them, or did not insure a supply of it, and consequently their lamps went out. (Matt. xxv. 8.)—As far as the man at the Marriage-feast, who did not persecute or insult the messenger sent to invite him, nor make light of the feast or the invitation; who did not prefer to it his farm or merchandise, who came to the lord’s house and ordinances, intermixed with the guests, professed to desire and partake of the feast,—but did not put on “a wedding garment,” by which was represented the holiness required, and graciously offered to the acceptance of all who will partake of the salvation of Christ. (Matt. xxii. 11.) — —

III. ON WHAT TERMS WE MAY BECOME TRUE DISCIPLES.

By “*forsaking all.*”

—The love of the world, all things visible and temporal. (1 John ii. 15—17.) Instances of failure by this we have in Demas; (2 Tim. iv. 10;) and Lot's wife. (Gen. xix. 26.)—The love of money. Instances of yielding to this we have in Judas; (Matt. xxvi. 15;) Ananias; (Acts v. 2;) and of forsaking it, in Zaccheus; (Luke xix. 2, 8;) Matthew. (Luke v. 27, 28.)—The love of honour and reputation. We may observe the influence of this in Balaam; (Num. xxii. 37;) and the Pharisees. (John v. 44.)—The love of pleasure, and indulgence of appetite and sense. Mark this in the people of Sodom and in the children of Israel. (Ezek. xvi. 49; Exod. xvi. 3.)—The love of ease, lukewarmness, and sloth. Of this we have an instance in the Laodiceans. (Rev. iii. 15.)—The love of our friends and relations. An example of overcoming this we have in Abraham. (Gen. xii. 1.) See it enforced in Matt. x. 37.—The love of life. Witness Daniel who was cast into a den of lions; (Dan. vi. 16;) the three Jews thrown into the burning fiery furnace; (Dan. iii. 21;) St. Paul. (Acts xxi. 13; xx. 24.)—The love of our own will, imaginations, and thoughts—The love of curious wisdom and knowledge; as renounced by St. Paul; (1 Cor. ii. 2;) by the Ephesians. (Acts xix. 19.)—The love of our self-righteousness. (Gal. ii. 15, 16; Phil. iii. 9.)—The love of all our property, of all we have, so as to use and manage it only as stewards. (See 1 Pet. iv. 10.)

APPLICATION.

1. Let me apply the subject by way of *examination*.—Are there not some who are called Christians, that forsake nothing for Christ, not even known and open

sin? nor secret sin? much less the love of the world, and the other things above mentioned?—Are there not others who, perhaps, forsake many things, but not all? who still retain that attachment to certain earthly connections, or pursuits, which proves an obstacle to their attainment of true religion, prevents their progress therein, and may be the means of their destruction?—“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not *all* that he hath, cannot be my disciple.” *Whosoever* he be,—though an old professor, though one that has apparently enjoyed religion, he cannot by all his profession, pretension, or confidence, be a disciple, except on these terms. If we make any thing more the object of our desire and love than Jesus Christ, whatever our professions may be, we are rather his secret enemies than his disciples and friends. — —

Let me adduce some motives to lead you to comply with the requirement of the text.—All you have will soon forsake you, or you will shortly have to leave all.—By these terms of discipleship, you are only required to leave what, if retained, cannot long be profitable, (Isai. lv. 2,) and will certainly be hurtful. What would prove snares in your way, and thorns in your flesh.—Unless you are ready to forsake all, you can have no solid and lasting comfort in religion.—Christ forsook all for you.—You are required, in fact, by forsaking, what in reality is a mere *nothing*, to obtain and secure to yourselves what is *all*. — —

Let me urge you to an *immediate compliance*. Delay not to “cut off the right hand,” to “pluck out the right eye,” to part with the gangrened, mortifying member, that will destroy the whole body; to part with blindness, disease, and destruction, in order to receive light,

health, and eternal life.—This advice was taken by Job, (chap. i. 21, &c.)—by David, who says, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee?” (Ps. lxxiii. 25.)—By St. Paul; who for Christ had “suffered the loss of all things;” and counted “all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. iii. 8.)

XCII.

JOY IN HEAVEN ON THE REPENTANCE OF A SINNER.

LUKE xv. 7.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.

THERE is, I think, no congregation of professing Christians, but will readily allow that every thing in the character of our blessed Lord, while he was here on earth, is worthy of particular attention. His wisdom, his power, his love, his zeal for the glory of God, and the good of mankind, his diligence in the prosecution of those ends, the humility of his mind, the meekness of his temper, the benevolence of his soul, his innocence, his purity, were all extraordinary and marvellous. Not only his doctrines and his miracles, but his spirit and conduct, were out of the common line, and such as had never been seen on earth before. As he “spake as never man spake,” and performed won-

ders, such as never man performed, so he lived as never man lived.

But there were two things in his character, which, although seldom noticed, were, perhaps, above most others peculiarly deserving our regard and imitation; I mean, the high value he always put upon the meanest saints, and the great compassion he continually manifested towards the greatest sinners. "Take heed," says he, (Matt. xviii. 10,) speaking of the former, "that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in heaven;" and, again, (ver. 5,) "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me;" and, (ver. 6,) "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." As to the latter, he failed not to manifest his compassion for the greatest sinners, on all occasions. He has assured us, (Matt. xviii. 14,) that, "it is not the will of our heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish;" and that he, "the Son of man, came to seek and to save that which was lost." In pursuance of this end of his incarnation, life, and death, he continually discovered such love to them, took such pains to reclaim them, and received them with such readiness, on their repentance, that, as the Evangelists have informed us, they frequently resorted to him from all quarters, were eager to hear him, hung upon his lips, and wondered at the gracious and encouraging words that proceeded out of his mouth. But this circumstance, among others, drew upon him the resentment and ill-will of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were persons of very different charac-

ter, proud, self-righteous, censorious, and severe, and who kept all sinners at an awful distance, saying, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." (Isai. lxv. 5.) In this respect, then, especially, did our Lord differ from the reputed religious, and the authorized teachers of that day, and in this point his true followers differ from those that are not such in every age and nation. Thus the sacred historian,—“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners;” some of all the different classes of publicans and other notorious sinners; “for to hear him;” influenced to do so through the condescension and kindness which he manifested towards all descriptions of persons, the most abandoned not excepted. As Luke goes on in the story, without any intimation of a change either in the time or the scene of it, it is most probable that the discourses following were delivered the same day that Christ dined with the Pharisee, which, being the Sabbath day, would give the publicans, who on other days were employed in their office, a more convenient opportunity of attending. “And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;” thinking this conduct inconsistent with the sanctity of a prophet, they were much displeased at it, and murmured at that charitable condescension, which ought rather to have given them joy. Hence, to justify his freely conversing with sinners, in order to their instruction and salvation, he delivered the parable of the Lost Sheep, (ver. 3—6,) and also that of the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Prodigal Son, (ver. 8, 9, and 11—32,) all declaring, in direct opposition to the sentiments and spirit of the

Pharisees, the very gracious reception which God is pleased to afford to returning sinners.—

To the first of these parables, our Lord added, as an application or improvement, the words of the text. From which I propose to,—

I. DESCRIBE THE SINNER, AND SHOW WHAT IS MEANT BY HIS REPENTING.

“Sin is the transgression of the Law,” says St. John, (1 Epist. iii. 4,) where the Greek word (*ανομια*) means not only *transgression*, but any *deviation* from, or falling short of the Law. All have sinned, especially in deviating from, or coming short of, their duty, as with regard to all the commands, so particularly with regard to the two great commandments of loving God and our neighbour. — — All men, therefore, need repentance in a sound sense. Some, however, are sinners in a peculiar sense, as having transgressed God’s law, outwardly, wilfully, deliberately, flagrantly. We may instance in sins committed against God, against our neighbour, against ourselves, our souls or bodies.

— — —

But what is meant by a sinner’s repenting? Repentance, is, in the first instance, legal, and then evangelical; being produced by the Spirit of God, discovering to our understanding, and applying to our conscience, the Law, or the Gospel.

Legal repentance consists in a conviction—of our sinfulness, of the sinfulness of our practice and of our nature, and the source from whence it has flowed, the fall of man:—of our guilt, that we are condemned, accursed, and exposed to wrath;—of our helplessness,

both in respect of removing the guilt, and breaking the power of sin. This will be followed,—by humiliation on account of sin, a low opinion of ourselves, notwithstanding any qualifications natural or acquired, and a consciousness we are unworthy of the good opinion of any, much more to be noticed of God;—by godly sorrow for sin, both because of the dishonour it has done to God, and the ruin it has brought on ourselves, and, it may be, on others of our fellow-creatures;—by hatred to sin, seeing its evil nature and destructive consequences.—Hence we shall be led to forsake it, and to “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.”

Evangelical repentance arises from a discovery of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and embracing the way of salvation through him, which sweetens all the particulars above mentioned with a sense of pardoning mercy and love to God, as reconciled to us through Jesus Christ, and a lively hope of eternal life. And thus an inward change is produced. Being, through faith, united to Christ, we become new creatures, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor. v. 17.) “Being made free from sin, we become servants of righteousness.” (Rom. vi. 18.)

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This leads me to show,

II. WHO THE RIGHTEOUS ARE, AND IN WHAT SENSE THEY DO NOT NEED REPENTANCE.

The righteous are those who have experienced this legal and evangelical repentance, and who are, by faith, pardoned,—renewed,—obedient. — —

Such persons have no need to repent as when first brought to God, or to begin the work of religion from the foundation.—If made thus righteous early in life, and they have not committed gross sins, they cannot repent of what they never did.—Nor, having been preserved from such sin, can they generally experience so great a depth of repentance. — — But as they still have fallen, and do now fall short of their duty, they need to be made sensible of it; humbled, and sorry for it; and to abound more and more in all acceptable obedience. — —

III. IN WHAT SENSE, AND FROM WHAT CAUSES, THERE IS “JOY IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH, MORE THAN OVER NINETY AND NINE JUST PERSONS—.”

There is joy on this occasion in departed saints, to whom it appears information is given, of what is doing on earth. (Luke xvi. 27, 28.) While on earth they rejoiced at the conversion of sinners, through their concern for the glory of God, their love to the souls of men, their sense of the evil and misery of sin; and these dispositions they have carried with them into heaven, and found them inconceivably increased; hence they rejoice much more at the repentance of a sinner than when on earth.—There is joy on this account in the angels of God; as their concern for God’s glory, their love to men, and sense of the evil and misery of sin, is greater than those felt by saints on earth; hence their joy is greater, when sinners return to God.—In the Lord Jesus. Besides his concern for the glory of God, his love to mankind, and his sense of the evil and misery of sin; he is also concerned “to see of the

travail of his soul," and the fruit of his extreme sufferings; hence his joy is much greater than that of the angels.—Even the pure Deity, though incapable of passions or change, yet has an infinite concern for his own glory, an infinite love to his creatures, and an infinite knowledge of the evil and misery of sin, and, therefore, he must take delight in the conversion of souls to himself. — —

But, it is said, there is more joy in the conversion of one sinner than in the perseverance of many righteous. The reason is not that the soul of a sinner is more valuable than those of the righteous; or, that a sinner is dearer to God; or, that when converted he will attain greater, or equal, glory or happiness;—But he is in greater danger; God's wisdom, power, and love, are more glorified in his conversion and salvation; and he escapes a more aggravated ruin, and greater misery. — —

Let us,

IV. DRAW SOME INFERENCES FROM WHAT HAS BEEN ADVANCED.

If there be joy in heaven, we may infer there must be sorrow in hell, when sinners are converted;—sorrow in spirits departed in sin. Through their enmity to God, and ill will to man, and insensibility as to the evil of sin, they sorrowed on earth when sinners were converted, and these dispositions they have carried with them to hell;—Sorrow in the devils, through their enmity to God, and hatred to mankind.

There must be sorrow in heaven, if there can be sorrow there, or rather less joy, when the righteous, especially such as have been long and eminently righteous, draw back, and commit iniquity.—

There must be joy in hell, if there can be joy there, when the righteous, especially when eminently holy persons, decline from the ways of God. This they account a great acquisition.

We may infer the great worth of souls, and the amazing importance of the conversion of one single sinner, which thus moves both heaven and hell. No merely human and temporal affairs are so important as to do this. — —

It must be a good work to help forward the conversion of sinners, and since God is pleased to use the preaching of the word as the great instrument for effecting this end, we should, therefore, promote the preaching of it as far as we possibly can.

Learn, also, the great guilt of those who hinder the repentance of sinners, or endeavour to cause the righteous to draw back, either by enticing them to sin, or laying stumbling blocks in their way. — —

APPLICATION.

You are all sinners, by nature and practice. And are not some of you eminently so? — — Have you repented in the manner we have before described.—If not, you are under guilt, and exposed to eternal misery.—You have, however, from this subject great encouragement to repent. If there will be joy in heaven upon your repentance, all heaven must be willing and desirous that you should repent.—Now will you give joy to saints, to angels, and to Christ himself, your true friends; or to the Devil and his angels, your sworn and everlasting enemies? Shall hell sorrow that you do repent, or shall heaven that you do not? — — —

XCIII.

THE BEST USE OF RICHES.

LUKE XVI. 9.

I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

How exceedingly do they mistake the nature and design of Christianity, who suppose that it consists in empty speculations and dry sentiments, however orthodox; or in barren modes and forms of worship, however excellent! The Religion of Christ, in all its branches, is experimental and practical; his doctrine is intended, partly to direct us that we may not mistake the end at which we ought to aim, and partly to furnish us with motives, impelling us to go on in the pursuit of it. The beautiful and affecting parable of the Prodigal Son, contained in the preceding chapter, was meant to rebuke the envious and uncharitable disposition of the Pharisees, to promote love and compassion towards the vilest of men, to show the importance and necessity of a forgiving spirit, and to encourage the greatest sinners to turn to God, under a persuasion that he is always ready to receive such to mercy upon their repentance, and even to treat them as though they had never revolted from him.—In like manner the parable of the Unjust Steward, from the conclusion of which I now take my text, was intended to reprove these same Pharisees for their covetousness, (ver. 14,) and love of the world, and

to teach the children of light in every age, to take example from the children of this world, and to use as much foresight and precaution in providing for their souls and for eternity, as worldly men use for their bodies and for time; to consider themselves as no more than stewards of what they possess here, and to bear in mind that they must shortly be called to give a strict account to the great Proprietor of all, for the use they have made of his property.—But we will refer to the parable itself, and you shall judge whether these observations are just.

“There was a certain rich man, which had a steward—” All we have, and which we are accustomed to call our own, is, in fact, the property of God. The faculties of our mind, the members of our body, our health, strength, and life, our learning, knowledge, influence, and abilities, natural and acquired; our wealth, time, offices, &c., are only lent us, or are trusts committed to us, to be managed for the Lord of all. The very Jews, blind as they were, saw this. Drs. Lightfoot and Whitby quote Rab. D. Kimchi’s commentary as follows, on Isai. xl. 21: “The fruits of the earth are like a table spread in a house; the owner of this house is God; man, in this world, is, as it were, the steward of the house, into whose hands his Lord hath delivered all his riches; if he behave himself well, he will find favour in the eyes of his Lord; if ill, he will remove him from his stewardship.”—“The same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods;” that he had embezzled, misapplied, or, through carelessness, suffered them to be wasted. And have we not done so with our talents? Have we not laid them up in the “napkin” of sloth, or “buried” them “in the earth” of worldly desire and care; suffered them to contract rust, and be damaged, if not lost for want of use? Or, have we not misapplied, and used them amiss, perhaps even against the honour and interest of him who entrusted them to our management?

“And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee?” I expected better things: “Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.” Gr. (ὁ δυνήσῃ) *thou canst not*; viz., with honour to thyself, or satisfaction to me, after such proofs of unfaithfulness. “This is designed to teach us, 1. That

we must all be shortly discharged from our stewardship in this world death will soon come and deprive us of our abilities and opportunities of doing good, and others will come in our places and have the same.

2. Our discharge from our stewardship is what we have deserved, for we have wasted our Lord's goods, and thereby forfeited our trust. And, 3. When our stewardship is taken from us, we must give an account of it to our Lord: after death is the judgment.*

"Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship." It would have been well if he had considered that before; but it is better to consider late than never. "I cannot dig;" or earn my bread by labour; (*ἐκ ἰσχυρῶ, non robore corporis valeo,*) but it was probably indolence, not the want of strength, which led him to say this; he should have said, "I will not."—"To beg I am ashamed." This was the language of pride as the former of sloth. "He had more reason, (says one,) to be ashamed of cheating his master, than of begging his bread." But, my brethren, what shall *we* do, when death dismisses us out of our stewardship? We cannot provide for ourselves then. and to beg, like the foolish virgins, will be unsuccessful and fruitless.—

"I am resolved what to do;" an expedient offers itself to my mind, by which I may secure to myself friends; "that when I am put out of my stewardship, they," my lord's tenants, or debtors, "may receive me into their houses:" Now the way he devised to make them his friends, was, by striking off from each one's account a considerable part of his debt, and giving it in to his lord, as so much less than it was. "So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures, (it should be *baths*,) of oil."† "And he said unto him, Take thy bill;" in which thou hast acknowledged thy receipt of it. This, which the steward had in his care, and which was probably equivalent to a note of hand, acknowledging the receipt of so much oil, and promising payment, he gave back to the debtor, saying, "Sit down quickly, and write fifty."—"Then said he to another, How much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures (or *ho-*

* Henry.

† The debtors, or tenants, paid their rents, or debts, not in money, but in wheat, oil, or other produce of the ground. A *bath* contained about seven gallons, two quarts, and a half pint. A *homer*, the measure referred to in the following verse, contained about eight bushels and a half.

mers) of wheat. And he said, Take thy bill and write foreshore.³ The twenty homers, which he allowed this debtor to deduct, would contain 170 bushels of wheat, and might be as valuable as fifty baths, or 378 gallons of oil; so that the obligation conferred on both those debtors might be equal.

"And the lord commended the unjust steward." Though he could not but be sensible that it was an act of great injustice, yet he praised him, "because he had done wisely;"—he had prudently provided for his subsistence, by making friends who might entertain him. Observe, he is not commended for acting falsely to his master, but for using timely precaution for himself.—a precaution worthy of our imitation in regard to the more important interests of a better life. "For the children of this world," Jesus adds, such as seek no other portion than this world can afford, "are in their generation wiser,"—they are not absolutely *wise* at all, but must be accounted *fools*, by those who believe in a life to come, a life of unspeakable and eternal happiness or misery; but *in their generation*, in the conduct of their worldly affairs, and in their way of living for the present world only, they are "wiser—than the children of light." They are more consistent with themselves, more true to their principles, more steady in pursuing their end, than the children of God who, although enlightened to see that there is an eternal state before them, wherein their true happiness is found, yet seldom appear to be so thoughtful and active in the great concerns of religion, as worldly men are in pursuit of the momentary and precarious possessions of the present life. The men of the world improve their opportunities and advantages, do that first which is most needful; in spring sow their seed, that in harvest they may reap; in summer provide for winter; take a good bargain when it is offered them; trust the faithful, and not the false. In these things we should take instruction from them; we should take an example even from this dishonest steward, and in the employment of the meanest, as well as the greatest of our talents, act with proper foresight with regard to our true interests in another world.—So the Son of God commands in reference to the use of our property.--"I say unto you;" I, the Wisdom, and Word, and truth of God incarnate, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, and of all that is therein; the Lawgiver and Judge of mankind, to whom they must give an account of their stewardship, when required to surrender all that is now entrusted to them;--"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

Let us consider from these words,

I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND HERE BY "THE MAMMON OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS," AND WHY IS IT SO CALLED.

"Mammon," is a Syriac word, and signifies riches, or wealth, *quæcunque ad rem pecuniariam pertinent*. This our Lord, in Matt. vi. 24, beautifully represents as a person whom the folly of men had deified; "ye cannot serve God and mammon." The Greeks had certainly a fictitious God of wealth, (called Πλούτος,) and there is reason to believe that he was worshipped in Syria under the name of "Mammon."* However, riches are undoubtedly worshipped in reality, if not in form. They are trusted in, loved, and sought by many, with the whole heart, the whole mind, and soul, and strength, as if they were the chief good, and "the one thing needful." And yet they are described by our Lord as,

"The mammon of unrighteousness," being frequently *procured* in an unrighteous manner, by deceit, fraud, violence, and oppression; by undermining, overreaching, and unfair dealing. Perhaps some may be inclined to say, they are generally acquired in this manner. Beza tells us of a common proverb, used on the continent in his day, *Fere quisquis est dives, aut est iniquus aut iniqui hæres*. But this is going too far. For God certainly so blesses the diligence, frugality, and economy of many as to make them rich, that they may be

* So Tertullian testifies. Vide Lex. in Nov. Test. Schleusneri in verbum. E.

a source of blessings to others by their beneficence, while they themselves prove, by their experience, the truth of the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts xx. 35.)

They are termed the "mammon of unrighteousness" also, because very often unrighteously *retained*, as from covetousness, and the inordinate love of them; from pride, and ambition, their possessors wishing to have the honour to be accounted rich, and thereby to be deemed of greater consequence, and obtain the greater influence and respect; from effeminacy, and the love of ease and pleasure, wealth affording the means of procuring all earthly conveniences and delights; from unbelief and distrust of God, lest he should not make good his promise, but suffer us to come to want ourselves, while, in obedience to his command, we are endeavouring to supply the wants of others. Moreover, while corrupt principles induce men to retain their riches, such a retention of them feeds and nourishes those principles. Add also, still greater instances of unrighteousness in retaining them. They are often kept back from those to whom they justly belong, when men decline, or are reluctant to discharge their just debts; to make restitution to such as they have injured; or, which is not much better, "when they withhold the poor from their desire, or cause the eyes of the widow to fail," &c. (Job xxxi. 16—21.) In other words, when any know how they may do good, and have ability to do it, but do it not. For to them such conduct is great and aggravated sin. How different the conduct of Zaccheus! (Luke xix. 8.) "Zaccheus stood, and said, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and

if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four fold."

There is yet another reason why riches are termed "mammon of unrighteousness." They are not only acquired and retained, but often *employed* likewise in an unrighteous manner; as to gratify pride in dress, furniture, equipage, and so forth, in an ostentatious and expensive style of living; to gratify anger, wrath, and revenge, against supposed offenders, who are often innocent; to gratify men's appetites and passions, by intoxication, uncleanness, fornication, adultery; by encouraging plays, balls, routs, races, and other fashionable, but hurtful amusements; by promoting strife, debate, and contest; nay, and even by buying, selling, and enslaving the bodies and souls of men; and, to crown the whole, they are, or at least *have been*, often employed in setting on foot and conducting persecution in all its horrible forms against the people and ways of God. Can any one doubt, therefore, whether riches merit the appellation of the "mammon of unrighteousness?" Surely they are one of the most powerful engines of hell, and instruments of vice and wickedness; and, therefore, termed by the heathen poet, *irritamenta malorum*, "incitements of evil;" and *ferro nocentius aurum*, "gold more destructive than iron, or the sword." Nay, when loved, according to St. Paul, they become "the root of all evil," enabling men to commit far greater wickedness, and to perpetrate greater crimes, than they could have done if they did not possess them; and, therefore, to plunge themselves into a far greater depth of destruction and perdition, than they could have otherwise fallen into. What a pity, that a gift of God conferred on men for the best and most important

purposes, and capable of answering the most valuable ends; of being “eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame;” should be thus abused, and made the cause of so much evil!

But most commentators think that the word (*αδικίας*,) here rendered “unrighteousness,” should be translated “deceit,” or “falsehood,” or, not adopting the Hebraism, *false or deceitful mammon*, because that no confidence can be placed in riches. They will surely disappoint all who trust in them for happiness or satisfaction. They deceive in three ways. — They promise themselves to many to whom they never come, and engage them in a fruitless pursuit after them. — They promise their possessors a satisfaction which they cannot afford. — And they promise to stay with us, whereas they soon “take to themselves wings and fly away.” There is, however, one way of avoiding all this evil, as well as this deception and disappointment, and that is, to use them as our Lord directs, by “making to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when we fail, they may receive us into everlasting habitations.” —

This brings me to the next particular, to show,

II. IN WHAT SENSE WE MUST “MAKE TO OURSELVES FRIENDS OF THE MAMMON OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Our Lord appears to refer in these words to the prudent precaution of the unjust steward, who, with his lord’s goods, had made himself friends to receive him into their houses when he should be discarded from his stewardship. — As it was a wise policy in the steward to act thus; and as it is the wisdom of the children of

this world so to manage or dispose of their money, that they may have the benefit of it in future, and not for the present only, so we should employ our talents, and especially the important talent of money, that we may be the better for it in a future and eternal state—we should “cast our bread upon the waters that it may be found after many days;” sow our seed now, that we may reap the fruit hereafter. It is true, whatever we have on earth belongs to the great Lord and Proprietor of all; yet if we dispose of his property, according to his command, among his tenants, or debtors, and especially among Christ’s members, so far from being blamed, we shall be commended. It is a duty to him, as well as policy for ourselves, so to act.

To prevent all mistakes, let me observe the meaning of our Lord is not, that we can please God by laying out, in deeds of charity, *ill gotten wealth*. Nothing can be more contrary to the genius of Christianity. God must be served with a pure offering. But if we have gotten wealth unjustly, we must first make restitution, like Zaccheus, and then we may bestow the rest in charity.

Let me observe again. We must not suppose that any one, man or angel, can befriend us while we lie under the displeasure of God; or that any deeds of charity can reconcile us to him, or procure for us his favour. The first thing to be attended to, by those who would make a right use of their money, is, that they themselves be justified, be at peace with God, and have him for their friend. This can only be through Christ “our peace,” (Eph. ii 14,) through whom those who had been “far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ,” and only in the way of repentance and faith.

But as this repentance must produce “fruits worthy of repentance;” (Matt. iii. 8; Luke iii. 8;) and as this faith must “work by love,” (Gal. v. 6; Jam. ii. 14,) so this may be one sense of the words. We must insure an interest in Christ, and reconciliation with God, by that genuine repentance and faith, which is productive of the proper fruits, and thus we shall have God our friend, who never can be reconciled to those that go on in sins of omission, any more than to such as live in sins of commission.

The Lord Jesus has told us, on what terms he will be our friend, “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John xv. 14.) “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Matt. xii. 49, 50; Luke xi. 28.) But what does he command? Nothing more expressly than deeds of mercy and kindness, “I will have,” *i. e.* I require, “mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Matt. ix. 13.) “Be ye merciful as your Father also is merciful.” (Luke vi. 36.) “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5. 7.) “Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” (Luke xii. 33.) “Do good to them that hate you.” (Matt. v. 44.) To do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (Heb. xiii. 16.)

Thus we make the angels our friends; those heavenly beings who “minister to the heirs of salvation,” and who, when Lazarus died, conveyed him “into Abraham’s bosom.” Thus also we make the saints, departed in the Lord, our friends, who are all like-minded with their Master, and are friends to those to whom he

is a friend. Those especially will be our friends, whom our charity relieved in this world; and the most of all those, whom we not only relieved as to their temporal wants, but also gained to religion by means of our kindness to them, and by our instructions, reproofs, and exhortations, brought to be friends of God. They, for the infinite and everlasting good communicated to them through our hands, must be greatly and eternally grateful. And what a happiness is this! Job considered it as one of the sweetest ingredients in his cup, in the days of his prosperity, that “the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him.” (Ch. xxix. 13.) If then the acknowledgments of those whom we have rescued from temporal misery, and restored to temporal happiness, be so dear to the ingenuous heart, what must not he feel from the grateful acknowledgments and benedictions of those whom he has been instrumental in rescuing from the eternal miseries of sin, and hell, and raising to the eternal happiness of purity and heaven?

Upon the whole, See that you are friends of God yourselves.—As in every other way in your power, so also, by a right use of your property, make others the friends of God.—By doing them good, make them your friends; lay under them under infinite and eternal obligations to you, such as they, being pious persons, can never forget, or be ungrateful for. — —

III. FOR WHAT END MUST WE DO THIS.

“That, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

A man is said to "fail," when he becomes a bankrupt. We must all thus fail at no very distant period. Death will come and claim the large debt we owe to him, claim our all as to this world, even our very bodies, since they are dust, and due to death. He will close our connection with the world, put his seal on our affairs therein, and make an entire end of our intercourse and commerce with men. Then all our comforts and enjoyments on earth, and all our abilities and opportunities for doing good here, will end. "For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither we are going," (Eccles. ix. 10.) Our "breath goeth forth, we return to our earth; in that every day our thoughts perish." (Psal. cxlvi. 4.)

The Greek may be rendered, "when ye suffer an eclipse." Death brings us under it; our health, strength, and beauty; our honour, glory, and renown; our parts and powers of body and mind, will suffer an eclipse. Our "flesh and heart fail." Our body with all its members, senses, and parts. These indeed often fail before death; "the silver chord is loosed, and the golden bowl broken;" the nervous system is unstrung; in consequence of which the eyes grow dim, and we can neither see our money nor our estates; the ears are dull, and we cannot hear of our gains or losses; the taste, and all the sensations, fail; "the keepers of the house tremble," and we cannot handle our title-deeds; "the strong men bow themselves," and we cannot walk to view our property, or to enjoy or make use of it. "The pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern;" the vital, as well as the animal powers, fail; the heart no longer propels the blood by the appointed channels into the lungs, nor, being sent back

from thence, with newly acquired vigour, is it again prepared for future circulation through the body. Our face is moistened with the calmmy sweat; the pulse is faint and irregular; the blood stagnates and becomes cold, and every member motionless and insensible. The heart having discontinued its action, all the other vessels fail to perform their functions, and death immediately ensues.

The powers of the mind fail, at least as far as they are dependent on the body. The will and the affections lose their vigour and liveliness, the memory its tenacity, the understanding its ready apprehension, its acuteness of reasoning, its solidity of judgment. "The sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened, and the clouds return after rain." (Eccles. xii. 2.) The lights of the mind, being so impaired, appear to be darkened, and afflictions are experienced in constant succession.—

Perhaps by the heart failing may be meant, the loss of all confidence and courage. Past sins are brought to remembrance with all their aggravation; present corruptions unite with the powers of darkness to assail our spirit; we see this life, and every thing in it, must be relinquished; an unknown world must be entered on; the river of death must be passed.—

But where is support and comfort to be obtained? Only—From the presence of God with us. "God is the strength," or rock, (Heb.) "of my heart," whereon my confidence is grounded." (Is. lxxiii. 26.) "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Ps. xxiii. 4.) But with whom will he be present? With none but his friends,

those who are reconciled to him as we have explained above, and who give evidence of the sincerity of their repentance and faith. Hence that well known sentence, “Blessed is the man that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him,” &c. (Ps. xli. 1—3.)—From a hope of immortality, grounded on the resurrection of Christ, (1 Pet. i. 3,) and the declarations and promises of God. And what are those declarations and promises.—That there are “everlasting habitations;” “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” (2 Cor. v. 1;) that there are “mansions” which Christ is gone to prepare for those who love him; the “bosom of Abraham,” in which many a poor Lazarus, whether relieved or not by human charity, or only relieved by the dogs “licking his sores,” is safely lodged, is at rest and comforted; a “paradise,” in which many a penitent, like the penitent thief, is “with Jesus,” and where are “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter,” and where are enjoyed unspeakable delights.—That this habitation is open to us as soon as we fail on earth; not only after the resurrection, but immediately after death. The soul, therefore, does not die with the body, or sleep.—That not only God and Christ, and the angels, but saints that have died before us, are already there, and prepared to receive us, and in particular that they are so, who by means of our benevolence and our right use of money have been made friends of God and our friends.—

But to receive whom? All mankind? those who when he called, refused? By no means. But those who brought forth fruits worthy of repentance; whose faith wrought, whose love laboured, whose hope pro-

duced a patient continuance in well doing, and made them steadfast in the faith, who, as they had ability, were “rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.” (1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.) To these Jesus will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. xxv. 34.) These the angels and saints will welcome into everlasting habitations.—

But whom does this doctrine concern? The rich and great? Certainly. But not them only. In the 12th chapter, Jesus had said, as we have before mentioned, “Sell that ye have, and give alms;” “provide yourselves bags which wax not old,” &c. (Ver. 33, 34.) “Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even unto all.” To whom he replied, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household?” (Ver. 41, 42.) The rich, or such as are generally accounted rich, are not, I say, the only persons concerned. For in the verses following the text, Jesus said, “He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.” (Ver. 10, 11.)—

Surely we have here most powerful motives why we should comply with the exhortation.—The things of this world are not, and never were, our own; therefore, we should readily part with them.—They are committed to us in trust, not for our own good only, but the best interests of our fellow creatures, in time and eternity, and the honour of God thereby; therefore, we should be faithful in administering that trust. — —

XCIV.

THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE SHOULD RECEIVE
THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

LUKE XVIII. 17.

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein.

IT is very remarkable in the teaching of our Lord, though, I think, seldom noticed, that many, perhaps I may say most, of his important declarations, predictions, and discourses, were occasioned by some apparently accidental, if not even trivial circumstance, which, however, was doubtless ordered by God's unerring Providence. Thus the admirable discourse contained in the twelfth chapter of this Gospel, against a covetous and anxious temper, on the duty of laying up treasures in heaven, and of being always ready for death, judgment, and eternity, with the parable of the Rich Fool, was occasioned by a person coming to Christ, and desiring him to "speak to his brother, that he might divide the inheritance with him." His important observations respecting the danger of riches, were owing to the young man leaving him "sorrowful, who had great possessions." (Matt xix. 23, 24.) His doctrine that "the whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick," and that he "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance," (Luke v. 31, 32,) with his admirable parables on that subject, were caused by the circumstance of the Scribes and Pharisees

murmuring at his "eating with publicans and sinners." His insisting on the universal necessity of repentance was owing to his being informed "of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." (Luke xiii. 1.) His most important discourse (John iii. 1—21) respecting the New Birth, and the design of his coming into the world, with the consequences of believing or disbelieving in him, was occasioned by Nicodemus coming to him to obtain instruction in divine things. His discourse concerning the water of life, and the spiritual worship of God, by his meeting with the woman of Samaria, while wearied with a journey he sat on Jacob's well; (John iv. 5—14, 23.) That about his Sonship, his right of judgment, and the necessity of honouring the Son as we honour the Father, by the Jews blaming and persecuting him, for healing a man on the Sabbath day. (John v. 10, 16—29.) That about the bread of life, by the people following him on account of his having just fed 5000, with five loaves and two fishes. (John vi. 26—58.) His invitation to drink of the living water, was owing to the circumstance of the Jews fetching water on that day from the fountain of Siloam. (John vii. 37.) Interrupted once when delivering some solemn warnings to the Jews, by his mother and his brethren, (Matt. xii. 50,) he took that opportunity of expressing his affection to his obedient disciples. The coming of John's disciples to inquire respecting his Messiahship, (Matt. xii. 2,) occasioned his discourse concerning John, and his expostulation with the Jews for their disregard both of his forerunner and himself. The disciples calling his attention to the "buildings of the temple," (Matt. xxiv. 1,) occasioned his prophetic discourse concerning the destruction of

the Jewish temple, city, and nation. His parable of the Vine, and the discourse connected with it, (John xv. 1,) originated, probably, from his observing the vines growing around the Mount of Olives, where he had retired. Thus it appears from the paragraph with which the text is connected, that certain persons bringing infants to him that he would touch them, gave rise to the important declaration now before us. Our Lord's example in this particular affords a lesson to Ministers, to improve, as far as they can, every circumstance that arises, and every passing event, for the promotion of piety and religion.—

Let us inquire,—

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND HERE BY THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

By this expression, the state of things in the Church triumphant is sometimes intended. (1 Cor. vi. 9; xv. 50; 2 Thess. i. 5.) Then the kingdom of God will be in its perfection; the King will be seen in his beauty; his subjects, their eternal state, its riches, glories, and joys, will be made perfect. — — At other times the state of things in the Church militant is to be understood. The parables of the Tares of the Field, (Matt. xiii. 24—30,) of the Virgins, (Matt. xxv. 1—13,) of the Labourers in the Vineyard, (Matt. xx. 1—16,) illustrate the kingdom of God in this view. — — But neither of these is the meaning of the expression in this place for we do not so properly receive the kingdom of God in these senses, as it receives us.—The Gospel dispensation is also frequently termed “the kingdom of God,” or, of heaven. (Matt. xiii. 61, 63, 47; Luke iv. 43; ix.

2, 60; Matt. xxi. 43.) By the Gospel, God overthrows the kingdom of Satan, gathers subjects to himself, and erects his own kingdom.—True religion under the Gospel must also, in this place, be understood by the words, “The kingdom of God is within you;” (Luke xvii. 21;) is “not in word but in power;” (1 Cor. iv. 20;) is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. xiv. 17.) *Justifying righteousness; i. e.* Christ’s obedience unto death, (Rom. x. 4; 1 Cor. i. 30,) faith, which is counted for righteousness, (Rom. iv. 24,) and justification hereby produced; *sanctifying righteousness;* (Phil. iii. 8—11; Eph. iv. 22—24;) *practical righteousness,* (1 John iii. 7; Luke i. 6.)—*Peace* with God, and peace of conscience, and tranquillity of mind.—And *Joy*, arising from a knowledge of our salvation, that we are in the favour of God, and are begotten to a lively hope of eternal glory.—All which is in the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. vi. 11; Rom. xv. 13.) — —

II. HOW WE MUST RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE TWO LATTER SENSES, THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD MAY RECEIVE US IN THE TWO FORMER.

—“As a little child,”—

Negatively. This does not mean that we are to be thoughtless and inconsiderate as children. Too many professors are such, and never can, as such, receive the kingdom of God.—Nor is it meant that we should be ignorant as children; (1 Cor. xiv. 20;) but we should make ourselves well acquainted with the evidences and nature of the Gospel, the nature, excellency, and necessity of true religion.—Nor are we to be foolish as children, having no proper end in view, in what we do. or

not pursuing it by prudent means.—Nor weak and easily deceived, soon persuaded and overcome as a child.—Nor fickle, changeable, and inconstant in our doctrine, experience, and practice. (Eph. iv. 14.)

But—*positively*. We should receive the kingdom of God.—Without prejudice, which blinds the mind, and prevents our discernment of truth, which vitiates the taste of the soul, renders spiritual and divine things offensive to us, and deprives us of all proper relish and delight in them. (1 Cor. ii. 14.)—In sincerity; without guile or hypocrisy, which renders a man odious in the eyes of God, to whom belongeth truth, who requires truth in the inward parts; who would have us sincerely desirous to know, believe, experience, and practise the Gospel, to feel its efficacy, and to understand and possess true religion.—In simplicity or artlessness; without craft, subtlety, or affectation; without suspicions or jealousies, which would obstruct our faith, confidence, trust in God, and the operation of the divine Spirit in our minds.—In humility; without vain-glorious desires, aiming at honour from men. (Psal. cxxxi. 1.) This causes God to resist us. (1 Pet. v. 5, 6; Jam. iv. 6—10.) This especially hindered the Scribes and Pharisees from receiving the Gospel, and from obtaining true religion. (John v. 44.)—Without secular views and covetous desires. (Psal. cxxxi. 2.) These would always prevent our coming to Christ, or being allowed after we have come to him, would prevent our continuing with him. (Luke xviii. 24; Mark x. 17—22; 2 Tim. iv. 10.) In a teachable spirit; conscious we have much to learn both concerning God and Christ; the Scriptures in general, and the Gospel in particular; concerning ourselves, our duty in every relation, our

danger and the means of safety, our privileges and prospects,—without confidence in our own knowledge and wisdom, which would exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ and him crucified. (1 Cor. i. 23, 24)—In a meek and loving spirit, without malice. (1 Cor. xiv. 20; Psal. xxv. 9; cxlvii. 6; cxlix. 4.) The Gospel is “good tidings to the meek.” (Isai. lxi. 1.) Hence we are exhorted to “receive with meekness the engrafted word,” (Jam. i. 21,) to take Christ’s yoke upon us, and “learn of him, for he is meek and lowly in heart.” (Matt. xi. 28.) The contentious and unloving will “not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness.” (Rom. ii. 8.) Thus the Jews contradicted and blasphemed, when the word was preached to them.—Without dependance on our own works; as children have nothing whereon to depend. For all self-righteousness would cause us to stumble at the stone of stumbling, as the Pharisees did. (Rom. ix. 30—33; x. 5.)—In faith, being ready and not “slow of heart to believe,” as children readily believe their parents and friends in whatever they say to them, since they know that their friends love them and would not deceive them. Unbelief respecting any thing revealed in the Gospel would preclude us from salvation, which is only obtained by faith.—In a spirit of confidence, trust, and dependance on the power, love, and faithfulness of God, as children rely on the power, love, and faithfulness of their parents and friends. Diffidence, and distrust in God, would certainly hinder our receiving the promises. (Rom. iv. 18—21; Heb. xi. 13.)—Free from worldly care and anxiety, as children are without such cares. This would distract, burden, and oppress our minds, and encumber them, so that we could not wait

aright on the Lord.—With appetite for “the milk of the word.” (1 Pet. ii. 2.) For a want of a spiritual appetite would hinder our receiving or digesting spiritual food. — —

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF RECEIVING IT THUS.

If we do not, we “shall in no wise enter therein.”

No other qualifications will suffice.—Suppose a man’s genius to be sublime, and his powers of reasoning incomparable;—his knowledge most extensive;—his orthodoxy indisputable;—his form of religion most complete;—his whole conduct irreproachable, and free from known blemish;—his good works without number;—nay, and his distress for sin, and earnestness for salvation, ever so great;—yet all were unavailing, unless he receive the kingdom of God as here required.—

[Let the Preacher PROVE these things; and APPLY the particulars before mentioned,—exhort,—alarm,—and encourage.]

XCV.

CHRIST'S COMING TO SAVE THE LOST.

LUKE XIX. 10.

The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

It is well known that the Author of this Gospel, Luke, the beloved physician, was, for some time, a companion of St. Paul in his travels. And St. Paul is also well known to have been a zealous advocate for the grace of God, for salvation by grace, and grace abounding to the chief of sinners. He says of himself, (1 Tim. i. 13—16,) "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." To the Corinthians, speaking of fornicators, covetous, drunkards, &c., as those who should not inherit the kingdom of God, he writes, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 9—11.) Of the Ephesians, he says, "You hath he quickened, who were dead

in trespasses and sins.—But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,—hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved,) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus,” &c (Eph. ii. 1—9.) To Titus, he says, “We—were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.—But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour:—that being justified by his grace,” &c (Tit. iii. 3—7.) Now, St. Luke seems to have thoroughly imbibed, and greatly delighted in, this doctrine, and to have written his Gospel partly, at least, with a view to show that it was the very doctrine of Christ; that St. Paul, in so freely admitting the greatest sinners, on their repentance, to a participation of Gospel-blessings, only imitated the example of his great Master, who had continually done the same; and that this doctrine had no such effects as the self-righteous Pharisees supposed, but the very reverse, producing such a change in the dispositions and actions of these sinners, as no other doctrine could have produced, and exalting them to a degree of love to God and man; in other words, of piety and virtue, as the Pharisees, with all their strictness, had not attained. Accordingly, St. Luke has recorded several particulars in the doctrine and life of Christ to this purpose, passed over by the other Evangelists; See

ch. vii. 36—ult.; xv. 18, 19; and another instance we have in the paragraph connected with the text. — —

This portion of Holy Scripture teaches us,—

I. THAT BY NATURE MAN, *i. e.* EVERY MAN, IS LOST.

He is lost out of paradise, where, without care or toil to himself he had every thing supplied, which was necessary, convenient, and delightful, to his body and mind, but where he is no longer found, being turned out and banished into the wilderness of this sinful world; become, as it were, a fugitive and a vagabond, being shut out from the favour of God, and communion with him; stripped of his image, and condemned to endure care, fear, toil, suffering, and the want of all things.—

He is lost in the darkness of ignorance and error. He knows not *whence he is*,—his true origin: *what he is*,—a compound being, accountable to his Maker, mortal, immortal, a probationer for eternity: *where he is*, on a narrow neck of land, betwixt two unbounded seas; on the stage of human life, erected for action, betwixt upper, nether, and surrounding worlds, observed by God, angels, devils, men; in a field for labour, which he is required to plough, manure, sow, and weed, in expectation of a future harvest; in a state of warfare with hell and earth, himself and sin; in a field of battle; in a state of continual trial: *whither he is going*,—where the road in which he is travelling will end; in annihilation, in a state of misery, or of happiness. — —

He is lost, like a sheep in the wilderness, separated from the flock, the pasture, and the shepherd; or as a traveller is lost, when he can see no way, or many ways, and he knows not which to take. There are many ways

presented before men which promise to lead to happiness; but Christ, the true and living way, is not followed. — —

He is lost through guilt; as a man may say, "My son has rebelled against his King, has committed robbery, or treason, &c.; he is lost." — —

He is lost through depravity; as if a person should say, "My son is corrupted, linked in with bad companions; has contracted pernicious habits, which are now confirmed; he is lost." Our will is perverted, our affections are alienated from God, all our faculties and members are misapplied to the service of other lords. — —

He is lost through spiritual wants; being destitute of spiritual food, raiment, dwelling; of "the bread of life," the robe of righteousness, the habitation of the divine name, which is a "strong tower" and place of protection. — —

He is lost as a vessel in danger of being wrecked on a stormy ocean, dashed on the rock of death, and plunged into the sea of divine wrath.

He is lost to himself, for he is neither wise nor happy; —to others, to whom he is not useful;—to God, whom he does not glorify; as a piece of silver may be lost to its owner, a prodigal son to a father, "my son was lost," &c.;—to Christ, as a sheep to its shepherd;—to earth, which he does not enjoy;—to heaven, which he is not in the way to attain; lost in his body, which is passing through infirmity, affliction, and pain, to death and corruption; in his soul, which is going through ignorance and folly, sin and guilt, depravity and misery, to endless perdition.

Nevertheless,—

II. MAN IN THIS DEPLORABLE STATE IS NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED OR NEGLECTED, MUCH LESS DESERTED AND ABANDONED.

The "Son of Man" is come to "seek and to save;" him.—Observe the high value which is put by God on this lost creature! The *Son of God* is made the *Son of man* for his salvation! Think of the dignity of his person. He is the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God, his Word, who created all things, and who upholds them by his power; He is God, Jehovah; (Heb. i. 8;) yet he left his state of glory, and assumed our nature. (John i. 14; Heb. ii. 14; Phil. ii. 6, 7.)

The Son of Man came not of himself, but was sent by the Father; sent out of love to his lost creatures. (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10.) God sent him "in the likeness of sinful flesh;" (Rom. viii. 3;) "sent forth his Son, made of a woman," (Gal. iv. 4.) and, therefore, liable to all our sorrows and weakness. — —

The Son of God, however, came freely and voluntarily, (Heb. x. 5—9,) though it were to assume our fallen nature, our infirmities, sins, and sorrows, to suffer and die in our stead. He came,—That being our kinsman he might be our Redeemer, and recover for us our lost inheritance, paradise; our lost blessings, the favour, the likeness, the peace and communion of God; our lost persons, souls, and bodies.—That as our teacher, the wisdom, word, and truth of God incarnate, he might enlighten us by his doctrine, confirmed by sufferings undergone, by miracles wrought, by prophecies fulfilled, and explained, applied and received by us, through the Spirit; and that thus, though lost in darkness and folly,

we might be rendered "wise unto salvation."—That as our Mediator, Example, and Guide, he might make himself our way to the Father, and to heaven, because we had been lost in this wilderness.—That he might expiate our guilt by his death, and obtain pardon for us, who were condemned.—That through his atonement and intercession, he might obtain the Holy Spirit and a new nature for us, who were lost by depravity.—That he might provide for us, who were perishing through spiritual wants, food, clothing, and a supply of all our spiritual need, by his body and blood, his word, grace, and ordinances.—That he might restore us to God, to his people, and to ourselves, as being lost to all these; and find us again, as lost pieces of immensely valuable money, restamping us for a new currency; restoring the lost sheep, the lost son.—That he might sink the rock of death into a plain; might swallow it up in victory; or, by his resurrection and ascension, make it an open gate of life.—That instead of our falling into an ocean of fire, he might bring us into a sea of felicity. Thus we are found to earth, to heaven, in body and soul, in time and eternity. -- —

As these ends cannot be answered even by Christ's coming, unless we are made sensible of, and humbled for, this our lost estate by nature, and are brought to know Jesus Christ; come to, and believe in him as a Saviour; and unless we receive and obey him; therefore, in order to this, he seeks us by his word, his messengers, his providence, and his Spirit, all of which he employs as the means of our salvation. -- -- —

Let us now inquire,—

III. WHO ARE SOUGHT AND SAVED BY HIM.

Negatively.—They are not those who think themselves in the light, and say they see;—who, in their own apprehension, were never lost in this wilderness, but have always known their way;—who are not particularly guilty, nor condemned;—not depraved and enslaved to any bad habits;—who are not sensible of spiritual wants; of hunger and nakedness;—who think themselves “whole, and have no need of a physician;”—who make baptism, the going to church, and sacraments, their duties, and endeavours, their Christ;—with whom mere morality is the new birth, and self-righteousness their clothing;—who slight Christ and his merits, his invitations and benefits, or receive them in a mere notion.

— —

Positively.—They are those, who, like Zaccheus, having heard of, or witnessed, some of Christ's wonderful works, seek to see or be acquainted with him;—who, in order to this, take pains, and use endeavours, and being “little in stature,” so to speak, “climb up” to see him;—who gladly receive Christ, his Gospel, his servants, his worship, his reproach, his cross, into their houses and their hearts;—who stand forth and confess him before carnal, opposing, persecuting friends and relatives;—who “bring forth fruits meet for repentance,” and faith, and love, especially in these two points, making restitution to the mortification of their pride, and being liberal to the poor, according to their ability, thereby counteracting their covetousness;—who become children of Abraham by faith in God's truth, in his promise and Son;—who not only talk about divine things, but actually receive the salvation of Christ, and manifest their election of God, inasmuch as his word hath “come to them in power and in the Holy Ghost.”

XCVI.

THE STUMBLING STONE.

LUKE XX. 17, 18.

The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

THESE words which are a quotation from the 118th Psalm, (ver. 22, 23,) were accomplished in the exaltation of David to the throne of Judah and Israel; and of him they seem to have been primarily intended. But inasmuch as David was a type of Christ, his “seed according to the flesh,” they were to receive a further and ultimate accomplishment in him. Indeed the whole Psalm was a prophecy of Christ, and was so understood by the Jews, as appears from the multitude applying some parts of it to Jesus, (ver. 25 and 26, comp. with Matthew xxi. 9,) when considering him to be the Messiah, and attending him in a triumphant procession, they say, “Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest:” although before the end of the same week their language was, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!”

Consider we,—

I. WHAT IS THE BUILDING ALLUDED TO IN THE TEXT, AND WHO ARE THE BUILDERS OF IT?

The building here alluded to is the Church of God.

which is compared in the preceding verses to a “vineyard,” to signify,—its being purchased by Christ,—its being separated from the world,—its being hedged around by the divine protection as by a wall,—its being cultivated, for vines are nowhere the natural produce of the soil.—It may be so compared also, to signify to its members that fruit is expected,—that work is to be done,—that it is peculiarly dear to God, and will be visited by him.

Here that Church is compared to a building, as it is also in 1 Cor. iii. 9; Eph. ii. 19, 20. This may be understood of the Church in general. The whole Church is compared to a building, (Matt. xvi. 18,) to signify,—its dependence upon, and union with, Christ as its foundation;—the union of its members with each other, like stones in a building;—that it is the divine abode, where God dwells; (Psal. xlv. 4, 5; Isai. xii. 6; Zeph. iii. 14, 17; Matt. xviii. 20;)—that it is the temple of God, in which he is worshipped, (Eph. ii. 21; Psal. lxxvi. 1, 2,) and where only he is worshipped aright. — —

But every individual member of the Church is likewise God’s building.—He is his house, in which he dwells; (Eph. ii. 22,) his temple in which he is worshipped. (2 Cor. vi. 16.) The soul of the believer is such; (1 Cor. iii. 16;) and even the body. (1 Cor. vi. 19.)—This is not the case with man by nature; though he was originally built to be an habitation of God, yet in his fallen state, he is like a house left desolate, a temple forsaken, a building in ruins. — — But this desolate house, this forsaken temple, this ruinous building, was purchased by Christ with his precious blood, (1 Cor. vi. 20,) that it might be rebuilt.—And

this great end is thus effected. The rubbish is cleared away by repentance; and a foundation is dug for the building; this foundation is laid in faith; the walls are built up in holiness; and the building is furnished and adorned with gifts and graces by the Holy Ghost.—It is rebuilt, that it may be inhabited as a house; (John xiv. 23; Eph. iii. 14—19; Rev. iii. 20;)—that it may be consecrated and kept holy to God as a temple; (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17;) and that God may be “worshipped in it in spirit and in truth.” (John iv. 23, 24.)

The builders of this spiritual edifice are all who are appointed to minister in holy things, and to promote the progress of religion, or to build up the Church of God. The Jewish Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, professed to do this; but in reality, instead of building up the Church of God, they pulled it down.—The builders are the Apostles, Evangelists, the pastors and teachers of the Christian Church, who are given, (*εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*,) “for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph. iv. 11, 12: see also 1 Cor. iii. 11—13; Rom. xv. 20; Gal. ii. 18.) It is their calling, office, and duty, to build God’s Church, to lay the foundation; to raise the superstructure, to furnish, to adorn, and enrich that superstructure, to minister to the whole Church in general, that it may be increased with members, to preach and defend the pure doctrine, and to keep up proper discipline in the body, to minister to each individual member in particular. This is what they profess and promise when they undertake their sacred calling, and what, if they neglect, they deceive and betray their trust. They receive their salaries, and have their maintenance for this purpose; and if they neglect to do their duty they are dishonest.—All

that are real Christians, having been converted, are builders in this work. It is their duty; they are called to it; not only to be built up themselves in faith and holiness, but, as far as they can, to build others up; to enlarge the borders of Zion; to add members to the Church of Christ, and to advance the knowledge, holiness, and happiness of each already belonging to it. It is their privilege; for they shall be rewarded for it here and hereafter.—All that have been baptized and profess Christianity, ought to help, and not to hinder, God's work in themselves and others; and unless they do this, they act very inconsistently with their profession.—Nay, all mankind, being the creatures of God, and the purchase of his blood, ought to serve him, and not his enemy and their own. But, alas! the generality are builders for Satan, and by their avowed sentiments and conduct, do promote the cause of error, sin, and misery. — —

II. WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE STONE HERE MENTIONED, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT REJECTING IT, BUT GIVING IT A DUE PLACE IN THE BUILDING.

By the stone, Christ is meant. (Isai. xxviii. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 4; Dan. ii. 34; Zech. iii. 8, 9.) Christ is called a “stone,” because he is—*solid* as a stone. He can and will support whatever weight is laid upon him.—*Durable* as a stone. He is an Eternal Saviour. — —

The importance of not rejecting or of not neglecting this stone, appears from the following considerations.—It is the only foundation that is or can be laid. (Isai. xxviii. 16; 1 Cor. iii. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 4.) As a Prophet he is made of God to us “wisdom,” and is the foundation of the knowledge and faith of the whole Church,

and every member of it. As a Priest, and our “righteousness,” he is the foundation of our privileges, of our confidence and hope for present pardon, and for eternal life. As a King, and “our sanctification,” he is the foundation of love and of good works, of all holiness and righteousness, of all gifts and graces, enjoining these things, and giving grace to do them.—It is the chief corner stone; at the bottom, supporting the building; at the top adorning the corner of it; the stone which unites and binds the sides of the building together, (Eph. ii. 14, 15,) being the chief support, and strength, and ornament of the Church.—To reject or neglect this stone, therefore, is to reject or neglect the appointed foundation, the grand support, strength, union, and beauty, of this spiritual building.

And yet, there are many builders who do reject this stone, as there have been in former ages, and will be hereafter. This brings me to show,—

III. WHO DO REJECT THIS STONE.

That it is rejected, is implied in the Psalm from which the text is cited. The builders of the Jewish Polity rejected David, who was a type of Christ. In the days of our Lord, the High Priest and other Priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, rejected David’s Son. He has been rejected in every age, and is at this day by thousands, who profess to be builders. He is rejected by many both public teachers and private Christians, even by all who reject his person or offices, his humiliation or exaltation, his grace or glory. Many reject,—his *Person*. His Godhead, for example, is rejected by those who do not lay him, in his atonement and suffer-

ings, for a foundation, on which we are to ground our expectations of present and future salvation, nor consider him as omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and who, therefore, do not apply to him in prayer, as able to grant all their requests. His manhood also was rejected by some ancient heretics; which is denying his real incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.—His *offices*. His prophetic office is rejected by all those, on the one hand, who trust in their own wisdom, or depend on the infallibility of any human teaching, calling a fellow creature, *Rabbi*; and by those, on the other, who do not, by hearing, reading, and meditation, study his word, nor by prayer apply for his Spirit. His priestly office is rejected, on the one hand, by all the self-righteous who trust in their own works; and by all diffident, desponding mourners, on the other. His kingly office is rejected by Antinomians, “who make void the law through faith;” by lukewarm and indolent professors, who are negligent and slothful in following after works of piety and love; by those that leave their first love and backslide; and by those who rest in what they have attained, and do not go on to perfection.—His *humiliation* is rejected by those who are seeking wealth, honours, and pleasure, on earth, and are not persuaded to deny themselves, take up their cross, drink of his cup, and have fellowship with him in his sufferings.—His *exaltation* is rejected by such as refuse to be subject to him as their head; (Phil. ii. 10;) to confide in him for protection from all adverse power; (Eph. i. 21;) and who do not consider his exaltation as a pledge and earnest of their own.—His *grace*, by such as do not receive him to “live in them:” (Col. i. 27; 2 Cor. xiii. 5; Rev. iii. 20.)—His *glory*, by such as remain contented with this

world, seek their rest here, and do not aspire after and pursue eternal life, and the glory that shall be revealed to the saints. — —

All reject Christ who do not receive him to enlighten them as their “wisdom,” to justify them as their “righteousness,” to purify them as their “sanctification,” and to bring them to eternal bliss as their “redemption.”—Who do not receive his doctrine as the rule of their faith, his merits as the foundation of their confidence, his Spirit as the source of their holiness, and his example as the rule of their practice.—Who do not come to the Father, to be accepted and made his children through him, as the “way,” do not depend on his testimony as the “truth,” do not come to be quickened by him as the “life.” “Ye will not come to me,” said he, “that ye might have life.” (John v. 40.)

IV. THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES OF SO DOING.

The builders who neglect to build *on*, or *with*, this stone, will soon stumble at it. They will try to remove it out of the way, to keep it far from the building, but they will be unable. It will prove “a burdensome stone,” as is said of Jerusalem; “all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces.” (Zech. xii. 3.) It will be continually in their way, will meet them at every turn, and they will stumble, and at length fall over it. (Isai. viii. 14, 15; 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8; Luke ii. 34.)

They shall be “broken,” as a man that falls upon a large stone. Dr. Whitby thinks that there is an illusion in this clause of our text to the two different ways of stoning among the Jews; the one, by throwing a person down upon a great stone, and the other by letting a

stone fall down upon him. But the allusion is, more probably, to Dan. ii. 34; where the destruction of all the opposers of the Messiah's kingdom is described in terms partly similar. "Many among them," says the Prophet, "shall be broken, and snared, and taken;" (Isai. viii. 15;) shall be hurt, entangled, and overcome; shall make no progress in building; shall be disappointed, and made miserable; shall miss of salvation here and hereafter. Such is the consequence of only neglecting to build with this "stone;" of stumbling at it, and falling over it.—

But such will proceed to "reject" him; to a wilful and total denial of his authority and offices in the Church. And on such, being now exalted to the head of the corner, he will "fall" with vengeance, and "grind them to powder." (Dan. ii. 44; 2 Thess. i. 7—9.) Think of the vengeance which was taken on the angels that sinned, on the inhabitants of the old world, on Sodom, on Egypt, on the Canaanites, on the Jews, on the Roman empire; and you may imagine what will be inflicted on all that neglect or reject the Gospel salvation. (Heb. ii. 3; x. 29; xii. 25;) on the impenitent at the day of final judgment. "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken;" whosoever shall stumble at me and my doctrine while I am here on earth in this humble form, shall receive much damage; "but on whomsoever it shall fall;" when raised up to so glorious an eminence; "it will grind him to powder;" he shall be destroyed like a brittle potsherd crushed by the weight of some huge stone falling upon it from on high. So, whosoever shall oppose me after my exaltation to glory, and the out-pouring of my Spirit, for the more full revelation of my Gospel, and complete evidence of my

divine mission, he will thereby bring upon himself most aggravated guilt, and a dreadful, unavoidable destruction. — —

XCVII.

THE FALL AND RECOVERY OF PETER.

LUKE XXII. 61, 62.

The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter: and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

THERE are not many things in the Gospel history, more remarkable, more affecting, or more instructive, than the fall of Peter. It is *remarkable* that one of Peter's character should fall at all into known sin. He had probably been a disciple of John the Baptist, and, under his instruction, had been brought to experience that true repentance towards God, which is the best, and, indeed, the only preparation to a saving faith in Christ. This faith he had, in a degree, both experienced and professed. Having been a witness of the miraculous power of Jesus in healing his wife's mother, when she lay sick of a fever, as well as many others; in procuring him and his partners a wonderful draught of fishes, after they had toiled all night and taken nothing; in multiplying five barley loaves and two small fishes, so as to feed therewith more than five thousand men, beside women and children; in calming the wind

and the sea, with a word spoken; in walking on the water, and enabling Peter himself to walk thereon; having seen also a vast variety of other miracles performed, fraught with mercy, love, and power; having frequently heard him speak as never man spake; and long observed him live as never man lived; and having been an eye witness of his glory, when he was transfigured on the Mount, and when “there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;’” (2 Pet. i. 17;)—He, without doubt or hesitation, repeatedly declared his faith in him. This he did at a time when many of Christ’s disciples, being offended at the mysteriousness, and apparent harshness, of his doctrine, went back and walked no more with him. Even then he had said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God?” (John vi. 68, 69.) He did it again soon after that time, when Jesus, having heard the various opinions which were in circulation concerning himself, asked the disciples, “Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” Peter then repeated with confidence his former confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” On this occasion Christ pronounced him “blessed;” termed him a “rock,” alluding to the name “Cephas,” or “Peter,” which he had formerly given him, and promised him very extraordinary power, saying, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” (Matt. xvii. 13—19.)

Add to this, that Peter evidently possessed great love to his Master, although not so great as he himself supposed, insomuch, that he believed he could go with him to prison and to death. On all occasions he was bold, courageous, and zealous, in his service, and although once severely rebuked for the worldly spirit and carnal views he then evinced; yet, upon the whole, he was treated by Christ with very great friendship and familiarity, and was favoured with peculiar privileges and advantages, and that, at least, for the space of three whole years. Now, I say, that Peter, after all this, should fall in any degree, and especially that he should fall so foully as he did, was surely a remarkable and extraordinary fact, and one which may well make us fear for ourselves, who, probably, are neither more strong, nor more stable, by nature, than he was, and certainly have not the same helps and advantages.

In the mean time, it is surely affecting to see human nature so weak, irresolute, and easily overcome, even in the best of men, if left to itself, and exposed to the assaults of the grand adversary of mankind. And may I not add, that it is instructive, and even encouraging, to see the riches of divine grace and mercy, so gloriously exerted and displayed in reclaiming, pardoning, and restoring such unsteady, ungrateful, and sinful creatures. This event, therefore, is well worth our serious consideration, as it may be a warning to us, and a mean of preserving us, if we yet stand, or it may be a mean of lifting us up and of establishing us, if we be already fallen.

Consider we,

I. THE STEPS WHEREBY PETER FELL, OR THE THINGS WHICH SUCCESSIVELY CONTRIBUTED TO HIS FALL.

The first of these which I shall mention is *self-confidence*, arising from too high an opinion of himself. The sources of this were the vehemence of his natural temper; the great condescension with which Christ had treated him; the commendation he had given him, recorded Matt. xvi. 17; and that promise of great power made to him by Jesus, and perhaps misunderstood by Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Ver. 19.) In this our Lord only meant that he would give him power to open the Gospel dispensation, (which he did both to Jews and Gentiles; see Acts ii. 14; x. 34; being the first who preached the Gospel to them,) to declare authoritatively its laws, and the terms of salvation, and to exercise discipline in the Christian Church, by refusing admission into it to all those who did not accede to those terms, and excluding from it all such as should violate those laws. Hence arose Peter's high thoughts of himself, and the confidence he expressed, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." (Matt. xxvi. 33.)—Another cause of his fall, was his *worldly views and expectations*, and his *aversion to the cross of Christ*. These were evidenced when our Lord began plainly to predict his sufferings. (Matt. xvi. 21—23.) They originated in the carnal nature of man, which, till renewed by the Spirit of God, is in all men earthly, sensual, and devilish; desirous therefore, of wealth, pleasure and exal-

tation, and averse to poverty, shame, and sufferings; and, also, in ignorance of the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom.—Hence his *unbelief*, as to the warnings Christ had given him of his weakness and danger, and the predictions of the assault which would be made on him by Satan, and of his being overcome and falling, and his consequent *boasting* of his courageous attachment to Jesus. (Matt. xxvi. 31—35.) Thus, when Elisha foretold to Hazael the cruelties which he would afterwards perpetrate towards the children of Israel, thinking it then impossible that he should ever be guilty of them, he said, “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?” (2 Kings viii. 13.)—As a consequence of his unbelief, he fell into *unwatchfulness*. He slept even naturally, and much more spiritually, at a time when great temptation was at hand, and Satan, as a punishment of his self-confidence and unwatchfulness, had obtained permission to “sift him as wheat.” (Luke xxii. 31; Matt. xxvi. 40.)—He *neglected* also to *pray*, through ignorance of his own weakness and instability, and of the subtlety and power of his grand adversary.—When awakened to a sense of his danger, and alarmed by the unexpected coming of the band to apprehend Jesus, he gave way to a spirit of *impatience and rash zeal*, by drawing his carnal weapon to defend his heavenly Master.—Immediately upon being convinced of his error, he passed on to *distrust, dejection, and cowardice*; he instantly forsook his Master and fled; the very Master with whom he had expressed his resolution to go to prison and to death; and this through a dread of reproach and suffering.—When, recollecting himself, he followed Christ, it was “*afar off*,” which was an emblem of the state of his mind. Had

he followed his Master closely, kept up to him, and been under his eye and direction, he would have been preserved.—He exposed himself still more to temptation by unthinkingly *venturing upon forbidden ground*, by going in among the wicked servants of the High Priest, led, perhaps, by curiosity, to know what would become of his Master; and this at a time when he had, in a great measure, lost his religion, and was weak and helpless like another man.—Now it is in a similar way to that of Peter, that most others fall. — —

II. THE AGGRAVATIONS OF HIS SIN.

It appears, I think, by comparing the Evangelists together, that Peter, when first charged with a knowledge of Jesus, spoke rather reluctantly, and denied his Master with hesitation. He equivocated, perhaps, and did not intend to tell a direct lie. According to St. Mark, whose Gospel we have reason to believe St. Peter himself revised, his words were first, “I know not, neither understand I, what thou sayest;” which is the same in sense in St. Matthew. It was, as though he said, “What is it you say?” or, “Of whom are you speaking? I do not understand what you mean by speaking thus to me?” This, however, as the Evangelists have observed, was properly denying him; and St. Matthew says, “he denied” him “before them all.”—After a little while he was still more bold and confident, telling a plain and direct lie, and confirming it with an oath, as St. Matthew assures us, declaring, “I do not know the man.” (Matt. xxvi. 72.) What, Peter! dost thou not know him that healed thy wife’s mother of a fever; that afforded thee so great a draught of fishes, when thou hadst

toiled without effect all night, and which made thee fall down, saying, "Depart from me,—for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" to whom thou didst go walking on the water; who stretched out his hand and caught thee when sinking; whom thou didst see transfigured on the Mount; whom thou didst confess to be "the Son of the living God;" who surnamed thee *Peter*; who took thee so lately into the garden of Gethsemane, where thou didst witness his conflict and bitter sorrow!—"Very frivolous," says Dr. Whitby, "is the excuse of Hilary, and St. Ambrose here, which they make for Peter, saying, 'He did not lie in saying, 'I do not know the *man*,' because he knew him to be *God*.'" "For this," as Jerome observes, "is so to defend the servant as to accuse the Master of a lie; for if Peter did not deny him, Christ must have falsely said, 'Thou shalt deny me thrice.'" This was indeed "a most incredible lie of Peter's, as there was scarce a Jew but knew Jesus, he being so noted through all the country for his doctrine and his miracles. Yet his own disciple, who has followed him three years, affirms with an oath, he does not know him!"—He repeated this lie again after the space of an hour or more, (Luke xxii. 59,) when he had had time for reflection; "Of a truth," said another servant, "this fellow also was with him, for he is a Galilean;" (ver. 59;) or, as St. John expresses it, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" (John xviii. 26.) And Peter denied again, saying, "I know not this man of whom ye speak." (Mark xiv. 71.) Not know him, Peter? Art thou not his disciple to whom thou didst say, "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life?" But it is too true; thou art not now his disciple: thou art not now learning of him, the faithful and true Witness, but of him "who was a

liar from the beginning, and the father of lies.”—To gain greater credit to what he said, and show he was not a disciple of Jesus, he “cursed and swore.” His imprecations, perhaps, referred to Christ; having now lost the reins and government of himself, he cursed and blasphemed his Master. Or, he cursed himself, and wished such and such things to happen to him, if he knew Christ.—And all this he did after he had received the most solemn and repeated warnings from him whom he knew to be the Son of God, who was acquainted with all things. (Matt. xxvi. 31—35.)

Peter moreover denied Christ in this manner on a very slight temptation, being questioned as to his knowledge of Christ, not by a mighty monarch, a king, a prince, or a magistrate; but by an equal, an inferior, a servant, a girl! Is this *Peter*, the courageous, the zealous, the *rock*, as his name imports! St. Luke, in his account, names him *Peter*, repeatedly. Alas! what is man, left to himself, in the hands of the tempter; if he be permitted to “sift him as wheat!”—He denied his Master, within his very hearing, and, as it seems, in his presence; a Master, of whose wisdom, and power, and justice, as well as mercy and love, he had the fullest evidence; and even after he had just received the sacrament at his hands. — —

But observe the time in which Peter behaved in this manner. “When Jesus was giving the tenderest marks of his love to Peter, Peter discovered the blackest ingratitude! (Matt. xxvi. 47, &c.) While Jesus redeemed Peter, Peter denied Jesus! While Jesus yielded himself to the bloody death of the cross for Peter, Peter refused to confess him!”

III. THE GRACE OF GOD MANIFESTED IN HIS RECOVERY, AND THE MEANS WHEREBY IT WAS EFFECTED.

From what has been said already, it is evident that Peter was guilty of sin, known, wilful, aggravated, by denying his Master, on a slight temptation, notwithstanding solemn and repeated warnings against it, vehement protestations of constant attachment to his cause, and after the most wonderful displays of the love and kindness of Jesus towards him.—For this he weeps bitterly, he is deeply convinced of his sin and weakness, humbled, made truly and exceedingly sorry, hates the evil he had done, and becomes a new creature.—He is pardoned freely, and fully; (John xx. 21; Mark xvi. 7; John xxi. 15;) and having had much forgiven, he loved much.—He became afterwards faithful, holy, useful, beyond most; and as remarkable for courage, fortitude, and zeal, as he had been for diffidence, distrust, and timidity. That such a change took place in him, was manifested very conspicuously after the day of Pentecost. (Acts ii. 22, 23, 32, 36; iii. 12—15; iv. 8—13, 19; v. 30.)*

* The several particulars related concerning Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, sufficiently evince his subsequent firmness and constancy in the cause of Christ. From the period (A. D. 52) when a council was held at Jerusalem, relative to the obligation of the Gentiles to observe the Mosaic Law, (Acts xv.,) nothing is recorded in the Scriptures concerning him. We learn, however, from Origen, and other ancient writers, that he exercised his ministry, amongst the Jews of the dispersion, in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia, and there is a concurrent testimony of all ancient writers, that he suffered martyrdom at Rome. This he is said to have done with his head downwards, his great humility leading him to desire that he might die in that posture. Clement, Bishop of Rome, exhorts the

And his recovery was effected by means unlikely, and to all appearance, insufficient.—I mean, the *crowing of a cock*. This having been foretold, brought to Peter's remembrance the admonitions and warnings of Jesus, and gave him a fresh and striking evidence of his wisdom, veracity, and power. Thus at the very time Jesus foretold his fall, he prepared the means of his recovery.—The *look of Jesus*, was also employed as a means. “The Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” The situation and circumstances of Jesus when Peter denied him, casts light on the meaning and force of this look.—“How eloquent,” says one, “those eyes! Never was a discourse more effectual! Never did an orator express himself with more force!” Who is it that looks?—Peter's gracious Master: and when?—when he was beginning to be most unjustly and cruelly treated by the persecutors of God's truth, and the enemies of all righteousness, for his unspeakable love to Peter himself, and others of the human race, whom he was about to redeem and save.

Jesus looks at him!—with a look of complaint. “It is the man of sorrows complaining of a new burden, while he is ready to sink under what he already bears!”—With a look of pity. “It is the compassionate Redeemer of mankind, pitying a soul ready to be lost.”—With a look of reproof. “It is the Apostle of our profession preaching in chains!”—With a look of power and victory.” It is the Sovereign of the hearts of men,

believers of Corinth, to patient perseverance, by the example of this Apostle, and of St. Paul, adding, “Through the unjust hatred, of the world, Peter sustained various trials, until at length having suffered martyrdom he was received into the glorious mansion prepared for him.”—E.

the Almighty God of love, curbing the efforts of the Devil, and taking away his conquest?"* — — —

The Holy Spirit gave efficacy to these means; and the effect was, as before remarked, most blessed and glorious. This timorous disciple, within the compass of a few weeks, when brought with John before the council, not only maintained the cause and honour of Jesus, but boldly charged the murder of this Prince of Life on the chief men of the nation, and solemnly warned them of their guilt and danger therefrom. He continued "steadfast and immoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord," fulfilling with great zeal his apostolical labours, until he was called to "put off his" earthly "tabernacle as the Lord Jesus Christ had shewed him," and suffer the death whereby he was to glorify God. (2 Pet. i. 14; John xxi. 18, 19.)

From this subject we LEARN,

That no dependence is to be placed on mere natural strength, to enable us to persevere in true religion, without supernatural aid. Who can say that he would stand, if his faith were exposed to any temptations similar to that to which the Apostle Peter was exposed? nor is there any thing so impious and dishonourable, to which we might not become a prey, if left entirely to ourselves. — —

When men are permitted to fall into actual sin, however eminent they may have been in holiness, they generally proceed from bad to worse. Every step makes way for another, involving us in more aggravated guilt. We should, therefore, avoid the least appear-

* See Saurin.

ance of evil, and learn to distrust ourselves; to be humble and watchful. — —

If any have fallen, they are instructed by the recovery of Peter, not to despair of mercy, provided, like him, they remember the words of Jesus, are pierced with deep remorse for their sins, and experience that “godly sorrow, which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.” — —

XCVIII.

NEVER TOO LATE TO REPENT

LUKE XXIII. 42, 43.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

THIS is one of those passages of Holy Writ, which is supposed to be very liable to abuse, on account of the encouragement which it seems to give to impenitent sinners, to defer their repentance till they are on a death bed, in expectation that they shall then easily find both the grace to repent, and the forgiveness of sins. And no doubt it may be abused in this way, as almost every fact recorded, and doctrine taught, in the Holy Scriptures, may be abused in one way or another. For what fact or doctrine, which we there find, may not be abused by men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth? Surely all the doctrines of grace, as they are termed,

and the facts on which they are founded, such as the incarnation, atonement, and intercession of Christ, may be, and often are, abused, to Antinomian purposes. And, on the other hand, all the laws of Christ, and precepts of duty, contained in the New Testament, may be abused to the purposes of Pharisaism and self-righteousness, and appear to countenance those that “go about to establish their own righteousness, and who submit not to the righteousness of God.” When we read, This is the love of God that “we keep his commandments;” (John xiv. 21;) “pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world;” (Jam. i. 27;) may we not be led to think that religion is a mere outward thing? Yet these and such like doctrines have an important use.

Just so, this passage concerning the penitent malefactor need not, and, if properly understood, will not, be abused. On the contrary, it will yield us very much and important instruction and edification, respecting the nature of repentance, faith, and conversion, as well as much encouragement.

We have,—

I. THE PRAYER OF THIS CRUCIFIED MALEFACTOR.

“And he said, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”—

This is evidently the prayer of a true penitent, in whatever way he became such.—It is not impossible, that his condemnation to death, and his sufferings in prison, might be made, through divine grace, the means

of producing that change of character. His “sin found him out,” and the punishment following upon it, might bring him to reflect seriously on his ways. We are told, indeed, by St. Matthew, (ch. xxvii. 44,) that both the malefactors reviled our Lord. “The thieves also which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.” And, by St. Mark, (ch. xv. 32,) that, “they that were crucified with him reviled him.” Hence some have inferred that both of them, at first, joined in the blasphemy; and that afterwards one of them, through Divine grace, with the extraordinary circumstances in which he was now placed, was brought to repentance. But had this malefactor, while on the cross, been guilty of reviling Christ, it is likely, that when he rebuked his fellow-criminal, (ver. 40,) he would have confessed his sin in that particular, and have assigned some reason for so suddenly altering his opinion of Christ. We may therefore conclude, that there is in this place of St. Matthew and Mark, what grammarians call an enallage of numbers, and that these Evangelists have put the plural for the singular, as the best authors, and even the inspired penmen, sometimes do, when it is not the writer’s intention to be very particular.—Other means employed in producing the repentance of this criminal, might be the cruelties and insults which were shown to Jesus, and his unexampled resignation and patience under them.—His pathetic prayer for his enemies, in connection with other previous circumstances of his astonishing history, known or witnessed by the malefactor, might convince him that Jesus was an innocent and holy sufferer, and bring more powerfully to his remembrance the crimes for which he

himself so justly suffered, and for which he had reason to expect the wrath of God in another world.—Being a Jew, he might also have some recollection of the ancient prophecies of Scripture concerning the Messiah, and comparing therewith the meekness and patience of Christ, he might conceive him to be the person of whom Isaiah wrote, (Isai. liii. 7,) and that it “pleased the Lord to bruise him, and make his soul an offering for sin,” especially when he heard him cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”—Moreover, the supernatural darkness which then began to take place, would tend to increase the reverence he had of him, and induce him to conclude as the centurion did, “Truly this was the Son of God.” (Matt. xxvii. 54.)

At whatever time, and in whatever way, this thief was brought to repentance. he now gave evident proof, indeed all the proof which in his circumstances could be given, that his repentance was genuine, bringing forth all such fruits as were “meet for repentance.”—He was convinced of his guilt, humbled on account of it,—and publicly confessed it;—he felt hatred to sin;—he possessed the fear of God.—He reprovèd his fellow-criminal.—He justified Christ, and that at a time when the Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders, and all the multitude, were condemning him, and reviling him; and he was in such disgraceful circumstances, that his own disciples dared say nothing in his defence.—He used for the honour of Christ, his heart and tongue, the only faculties at liberty.

His prayer was that of a believer. There are all the marks of faith in it.—He judges not by appearance; he acknowledges Jesus to be the King Messiah, though

suffering as a condemned slave and malefactor on a cross. How well it had been for the Jews, if they had seen things in the same light!—He sees him to be glorious, though “despised and rejected of men.”—He believes in a state after death, in the immortality of the soul, if not also, the resurrection of the body—He believes that in this state, this poor, mean, persecuted, and suffering man, should enter into his kingdom, and, therefore, that his kingdom was not of this world.—That Jesus would not only be saved, and be glorious and happy himself, but was able to make others so, and that after they were dead.—That he would do this of mere grace and mercy, for the unworthy, even for the vilest; for *thieves*, who were penitent, and applied to him.—

His prayer was that of one deeply concerned about salvation. Though there can be no doubt his pain and misery were great, yet his necessity being also great, amidst every hinderance and discouragement, he prays sincerely and fervently, and not for ease and relief from temporal and bodily sufferings, but for eternal salvation.—

His prayer was that of one entirely humbled and resigned, patient, and contented to suffer “the due reward of his deeds.” He only asks modestly, “Remember me;” not, “Let me sit on thy right hand, or on thy left, in thy kingdom.”—

Here, therefore, we have a greater miracle of mercy, and a more splendid trophy of grace, than the rending of the rocks, the opening of the graves, the rending of the veil of the temple, the darkening of the sun, or any of the signs attending our Lord’s death.

II. THE ANSWER OF CHRIST.

“Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”—

Though in circumstances of most dreadful suffering, Jesus takes notice of an ejaculation from a poor and condemned malefactor.—He does not upbraid him with his past thefts and other vices.—He accepts his repentance and faith, though at the eleventh hour.—He promises happiness to him after death.—That he should be with himself. “Thou,” guilty as thou art, vile and debased as thou hast been, being renewed by grace, and made meet “shalt be with me.”—What company! —“in paradise;” or the abode of the blessed. Adam, by sin, lost paradise; Christ, by his righteousness and sufferings, regains it; a better paradise than Adam lost, and that for the most unworthy.—He promises it immediately. “To-day shalt thou be with me.” The soul, therefore, does not die with the body, but directly after death is conveyed to the separate state. (Phil.i. 23,)*—He confirms all with, “Verily I,” the Wisdom, Word, and Truth of God, “say” this “unto thee.” Farther, he was about to seal the truth of his words by his blood, and subsequent resurrection. — —

INFERENCES.

They are much mistaken who suppose that this thief was taken into heaven in his sins. There was evidently

* The Church of England, in her Office for the Burial of the Dead, says, that “the souls of them that sleep in Jesus, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, *are in joy and felicity.*” See the Author’s Commentary; where several important observations occur on this subject in the Notes on this and other texts.—E.

a true, although short work of saving grace wrought in his soul, of repentance and faith. — —

The circumstances of this thief were altogether peculiar. He had been an eye-witness of the dreadful and undeserved sufferings of Christ, and of his unparalleled meekness under them; had heard his prayers for his enemies, seen the supernatural darkness, which alone was almost sufficient to produce astonishment and dread, in all whose hearts were not perfectly hardened. None, therefore, can reasonably take occasion from this instance to expect they shall find mercy on a death-bed, having not sought it before.—The other malefactor, under similar circumstances, was not moved, but hardened. None, therefore, should presume.

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APPLICATION.

Sinners! He gave repentance, faith, and pardon, when lifted up on the cross; he is now exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give them. O! abuse not God's goodness, which should lead you to repentance. You cannot outwit God, and get both the pleasures of sin, and the kingdom of heaven. Say not, "The Lord delayeth his coming," (Matt. xxiv. 48,) lest you be hardened like the other thief. If you depend on repenting on a death-bed, he may send an apoplexy, a fever in the brain, or other sudden malady, and so come to you as a thief.—How near are you to hell or paradise! O! be concerned; "awake thou that sleepest,"—"arise call upon thy God, if so be God may think upon you, that you perish not;" proceed as far as this thief.—make sincere confession,—acknowledge the equity of all you

might be made to suffer for your sins.—*Fear*, and call upon your fellow-sinners to *fear*, the vengeance to be inflicted upon sinners, in another world. Bear testimony to Jesus, and exercise faith in him, as the Lord and Saviour of all men; especially of them that believe.

Mourners! Ask, seek, knock. Christ is ready to receive sinners; to grant their petitions; to exceed them. If you be ready to despair, and say, that the thief never heard of salvation before, let me adduce the instance of Peter; he had heard the discourses, and witnessed all the miracles of Jesus, yet, after his foul and ungrateful denial, obtained mercy. — —

Self-righteous! Be not, like the elder son, angry at the prodigal entering into paradise by the same door with you. (Luke xvi.) There is only one way and one door by which we must all be admitted. — —

Believers! See, it is your privilege to receive the answer to your prayers; in a “knowledge of salvation by the remission of your sins,” and a certainty of paradise.—Like this malefactor, make the best of a short life.—Pray to Christ, and speak for Christ, particularly on a sick and death-bed.—Esteem him the more for the revilings of the wicked.—Make a stand against sin.—Be patient on the cross.—Be humble and modest in your requests and expectations, while “in well-doing you commit the keeping of your souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator.”—

XCIX.**THE REASONS OF CHRIST'S DEATH AND
RESURRECTION, AND THE DOCTRINES
GROUNDED THEREON.****LUKE XXIV. 46, 47.**

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

(PART I.)

THE humiliation and exaltation, the sufferings and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, are facts, in themselves, most extraordinary and marvellous. That the eternal Word and Son of God, the Maker, Upholder, and Heir of all things, should stoop so low and suffer so much; should be an infant of days, born in a stable; a man of sorrows, exposed to continual reproach, persecution, infamy, and suffering; should be sentenced to die, and should actually expire upon a cross, as a malefactor, is surely wonderful and extraordinary. Again, that this poor, mean, despised, persecuted, and suffering man, should be exalted to the right hand of God, placed at the head of the creation, invested with all power in heaven and on earth, and constituted the final Judge of angels and men, is equally marvellous and unprecedented.

These two events, the death and resurrection of Christ, are the fundamentals of Christianity; upon these the whole fabric rests; upon them all its doctrines, privileges, and duties, are built, and by them they are supported; they bear testimony to, and confirm its doctrines, procure its privileges, and enforce its duties. No wonder, therefore, that the Evangelists are so full and particular in their account of them, relating them in all their circumstances, and that our Lord himself, even after his resurrection, should make them the principal subjects of his discourse with his disciples. Nor can we be surprised that our Church should, in all her services, call our attention to them, and institute particular days for the commemoration of them.

Let us consider,—

I. THE REASONS WHY IT BEHOVED CHRIST TO SUFFER, AND TO RISE FROM THE DEAD THE THIRD DAY.

He did so that he might fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning himself, and prove himself to be the true Messiah.—It had been largely foretold that the Messiah should suffer; (Isai. liii. 1—3;) what he should suffer; (Psal. ii. 2; lxix. 21; Isai. l. 5—7; lii. 14; Dan. ix. 26;) why he should suffer; (Isai. liii. 4—6, 10;) and how, or in what spirit, he should suffer. (Isai. liii. 7.)—His resurrection had also been foretold; (Psal. xvi. 10, 11; Isai. lii. 13; liii. 8, 10, 12;) and the time of his resurrection had been typified in the history of Jonah. (Matt. xii. 40.)—And it was necessary that these and such like predictions concerning him should be fulfilled. — —

It behoved him "to suffer and rise from the dead,—"
in the execution of his sundry offices.

Of his **PROPHETIC OFFICE**; as a teacher come from God; that he might confirm and show the certain truth and the deep importance of his doctrine, and manifest himself to be the "faithful and true witness." The qualities most necessary in a teacher are—*Integrity*; that he does not intentionally deceive us, but instruct, according to the best of his knowledge. Of this we may be certain, if on the one hand he has no prospect of gaining honour, wealth, ease and advantage, to himself, by his doctrine; and more especially if, on the other hand, he has only to expect reproach, imprisonment, and death, as his reward.—*Ability*; especially in one point; we expect that the teacher knows the truth of what he teaches, and is not deceived himself.—Now these two qualifications were evidently united in Christ. He had nothing to expect but reproach, suffering, and death, as the reward of his doctrine, and, therefore, could not intentionally deceive us. God's raising him from the dead shows that he was not deceived himself; for he would not have set such a seal to the doctrine of an enthusiast, or a false teacher. — —

Of his **SACERDOTAL OFFICE**; as the High Priest of our profession.—He suffered, that he might learn to sympathize with us in our sufferings (Heb. v. 2; iv. 15, 16; ii. 17, 18.) Thus he has become a merciful and faithful High Priest. He suffered that he might atone for our sins by offering up his own body. (Heb. v. 1; comp. vi. 20; ii. 17; vii. 27; ix. 11, 12, 24, 27, 28; x. 5—14; Isai. liii. 5, 6, 10; 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. iii. 24; iv. 25.) Thus the infinite evil of sin is manifested and the punishment due to it; we are brought to repentance for it;

(Zech. xii. 10;) we die to it; (1 Pet. ii. 24;) die to the world; (Gal. vi. 14;) and to ourselves. (Gal. ii. 20)—He rose that he might be able to succour us in our temptations; that he might give us full proof that the sacrifice he had offered for our sins was accepted, and lay a foundation for our confidence in him; that he might ascend, and “appear in the presence of God,” as our Advocate and Intercessor. (John xvi. 7; Heb. i. 3; iv. 14; ix. 12; Acts ii. 32, 33.)—Thus pardon, God’s favour, and the Holy Spirit, are procured for us, to seal forgiveness on our hearts, and impart a divine nature.

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Of his REGAL OFFICE; as the King and Governor of his people. (Rom. xiv. 9.) He was humbled that he might be exalted, (Phil. ii. 5—9,) as had been the case with his types, Joseph, Moses, and David; in his humiliation he purchased his sheep. (John x. 10—18; Acts xx. 28; 1 Cor. vi. 20; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.)—He rose that he might deliver, protect, and govern his people, and be the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, (Heb. xiii. 20; 1 Pet. ii. 25,) that he might subdue all our enemies, even death itself, (Heb. x. 12, 13,) and exalt us to live and reign with him. (John x. 27, 28.) — —

Christ suffered and rose as our PATTERN and FORE-RUNNER; he suffered to show—that our way lay through sufferings to glory. Like him we must suffer; (Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12; 1 Pet. ii. 21; iii. 14—18; iv. 12—16;) and his resurrection and ascension are a pledge and earnest of ours. (1 Cor. xv. 20; John xiv. 1—3.)—That we must be conformed, in a spiritual sense, to his death and resurrection. (Rom. vi. 3, 4; Col. ii. 13; iii. 1; Eph. ii. 1.) — —

His death and resurrection were necessary, that he might sustain the characters he bears.—As our *way*, our reconciler, introducer to the Father, and our example; our *truth*, the substance, answering the shadows and types of the Mosaic Law, and a sure and infallible guide and director; and our *life*, acquitting us from condemnation to death, quickening our souls, and putting us in possession of life everlasting.—As our “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor. i. 30.) — —

IMPROVEMENT.

Has our Jesus fulfilled the ancient prophecies in these particulars? Then how certainly is he the long expected Messiah; the Christ; the Son of God? and how infallibly true, and deeply important, are the Scriptures of the Prophets?—

Was it necessary he should seal the truth with his blood, and confirm it by his resurrection? And shall we disregard or disbelieve it? Shall we not hearken to, and confide in, a Teacher so authorized? — —

Did he suffer that he might be a Priest, merciful, faithful, powerful? Then let us come to him, and to the Father through him; and trust in him, notwithstanding all our past sins, present corruptions, weaknesses, and temptations.—

Has he redeemed and bought us as his people at so great a price, that he might deliver, possess, protect, and govern us? Then let us not delay to put him in possession of his purchase. Let us no longer rob him of his right, but freely give ourselves to him to be delivered, protected, and governed, by him; to be his loyal subjects, till he exalt us to reign with him.—

Did he suffer and rise as our pattern and forerunner? Then let us not be unwilling to follow him through sufferings to glory. (1 Pet. iv. 1.)—The sufferings we may have to endure, will be comparatively light and short (2 Cor. iv. 17;) the glory will be boundless and eternal!—

C.

THE DOCTRINES GROUNDED ON CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

LUKE XXIV. 46, 47.

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

(PART II.)

ALL the words, spoken by the lips of him, who was the Amen, the Truth, Wisdom, and Word of God incarnate, the Saviour, the Lawgiver, and Governor of all men, and whose Word shall judge us at the last day, are solemn, important, and worthy of peculiar attention and regard; especially those spoken after his resurrection, and still more those spoken *immediately* after he rose, or just before his ascension into Heaven.—It appears from the context, that these words, together with those preceding, from ver. 44, were spoken at

one of those times, most probably on the day of his ascension.

In the first part of this discourse, we have pointed out some reasons why it was necessary for Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead; as, that he might fulfil the prophecies; execute his saving offices; become our pattern and forerunner; and sustain various characters which he bears.—We now go on to consider,

II. THE DOCTRINES WHICH THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST ARE ENJOINED TO PREACH, AS GROUNDED UPON, AND ENFORCED BY, HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.”—

And in doing this, we shall show,

Their nature.—“That repentance and remission of sins should be preached.”—

REPENTANCE was the first doctrine Christ, and his forerunner John the Baptist, preached; (Matt. iii. 2; Mark i. 15;) the first which his disciples preached during his life, (Mark vi. 12,) and after his death, resurrection, and ascension; (Acts ii. 38; iii. 19; xvii. 30;) the substance of all their Sermons. And equally necessary is it to be preached now; mankind are the same in every age, equally sinful and guilty; God is the same, equally holy, just and merciful; Christ, and his Gospel, are the same, on the authority of which it is to be preached. — —

As to the nature of this repentance. The original word (*μετάνοια*) means—

AFTER-CONSIDERATION OR REFLECTION. Repentance begins in looking back, or reflecting with attention and care upon our past conduct, as our actions, sins of omis-

sion and commission, our words, tempers, desires, motives, ends, thoughts; comparing them with the will of God, as signified in his Word in general, and his Law in particular, and considering the obligation laid on us to obey him from duty, gratitude, and interest.—

A CHANGE OF MIND; which arises from the former.— This takes place in the *understanding*; the eyes of which are opened, and we see ourselves in a very different light from what we did before. Now we are convinced of our former ignorance, unreasonableness, and folly, (Tit. iii. 3,) in preferring sin to righteousness, the world to God, the body to the soul, Belial to Christ, time to eternity; of sin, of the number, greatness, infinite evil, and inexcusableness of our sins, as breaking through the infinite obligations we were under to honour, love, and obey God; of our guilt, and desert of condemnation and wrath; of our weakness, that we cannot make atonement for the past, deliver ourselves from sin at the present, or preserve ourselves from it for the future; that we cannot resist our enemies, or do, or suffer, the will of God.—This change takes place in the *conscience*; which is well informed respecting sin, and duty; deeply awakened and wounded; (Acts ii. 37; xvi. 30;) burdened with a sense of guilt, and desert of punishment; (Matt. xi. 28;) sprinkled from evil; (Heb. ix. 14;) made tender and sensible of the slightest touch of sin.—It takes place in the *affections*; including shame and sorrow for past sin, hatred to, and fear of, sin; and esteem for, and desire after, and delight in, holiness. (2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.)—It takes place in the *will*; as to its choice, leading us to prefer holiness to sin, God to the world, the soul to the body; as to its intention, inducing us now to propose God's glory as our end in

every thing; as to its determination, being resolved and fixed for God and eternal life.—A corresponding change will consequently arise in all our tempers, words, and works, and fruits will be “brought forth worthy of repentance.” (Luke iii. 8.) — —

REMISSION of *sins* was also preached continually to all the penitent by Christ, (Luke vii. 47, 48; xv.; xviii. 13, 14; xix. 9; and by the Apostles. (Acts ii. 38; iii. 19; v. 31; x. 43; xiii. 38.)—It implies, and is followed by acquittance from guilt. condemnation, and wrath, acceptance with God, his favour, adoption into his family, regeneration, sanctification, a title to, and fitness for, his kingdom.—This blessing still belongs to all the penitent. (1 John i. 9; Prov. xxviii. 13; Isai. i. 16—18; Ezek. xviii. 21, 31, 32.) But it can only be received by *faith* in the Gospel, (Rom. i. 16,) and in Christ. (Acts x. 43; xiii. 38; Rom iii. 24, 25.)* — —

These doctrines must be preached in the name of Jesus.
—“In his name.”

In his name as a *Prophet*. That is, on his authority, and in imitation of his example, who came from God, as an extraordinary and great Teacher and Lawgiver; the most extraordinary, and the greatest that ever appeared; with credentials such as no other ever had; confirming and recommending his doctrine by a holy life, by miracles and predictions: as the Prophet like unto Moses; (Deut xviii. 15; Acts iii. 22;) yea, greater than Moses; the Messiah, sealing his doctrine with his *death* and *resurrection*. Now he taught repentance and remission of sins and enjoined them to be taught by his disciples. They are taught, therefore, “in his name;” or

* Describe briefly this faith, together with its fruits.

on his authority, and in imitation of his example. How dreadful the consequence of rejecting or neglecting his doctrine! (Acts iii. 23; Heb. ii. 1—4.) — — In his name as a *Priest*; or through his merits, and by his Spirit. His death and resurrection recommend our repentance, and render it available to salvation, which otherwise it could not have been;—they render it possible and easy to repent, procuring grace for us that we may do it, without which we could not;—they procure and ensure to the penitent remission of sins and all its fruits. — — In his name as a *King*; who, with supreme authority and power, requires that sinners should be pardoned on earth in order to their being saved in heaven, declaring, “If ye die in your sins, whither I go ye cannot come;” (John viii. 21;) that in order to pardon, we should repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance;—declaring, “Except ye repent, ye shall all perish;” (Luke xiii. 3;)—and who confers upon us both the one and the other.) — — In his name as a *suffering Man*; whose sufferings for sin demonstrate its infinite evil, and destructive tendency, and on this account, as well as out of sympathy with him, and gratitude to him, loudly call upon us, and strongly recommend us, to repent for sin, and die to it. (Isai. liii. 5, 6; Zech. xiii. 7; xii. 10; 1 Pet. ii. 21—25; John xii. 32.) — — In his name as the *incarnate God*; in reverence for his person, and in adoration of his majesty and glory, and in confidence in his grace, to work this repentance in us, and bestow remission of sins upon us. — — In his name as our *final Judge*; whose power we must fear, and whose wrath we must dread. For he will especially inquire in the great day of trial who had repented and were pardoned; he will acquit only such

and will condemn all others. (Acts xvii. 31; 2 Thess. i. 7—10.) — —

These doctrines must be preached “*AMONG ALL NATIONS.*”

All having sinned, need repentance; (Rom. iii. 23; Acts xvii. 30;) and all being guilty, need remission of sins.—Christ having died and rose again for all; in consequence of which all are capable of repentance and forgiveness. (2 Cor. v. 15.) — —

They must be *BEGUN to be preached* at JERUSALEM. *Literally* understood.

. Christ was first promised to the Jews, and, therefore, must first be offered to them. The promise of the Messiah was the entail of that family, “of whom concerning the flesh Christ came.” (Rom. ix. 4, 5.) The Gentiles come in as Legatees to the New Will or Testament in his blood, whereby he cut off the entail, and subjected Jews and Gentiles to the same terms of salvation. (Rom. iii. 29, 30.)—The foundation of the Gospel must be laid at that place where it was first attacked. The report of the disciples stealing away the body of Jesus was a blow at the root of his religion. That lie must be confuted. Christianity would have been offered to the world around with great disadvantage, if it had not first shown itself at Jerusalem. The witnesses of Jesus were a sufficient number of men of approved honesty, who had no motive to testify a falsehood, but had every motive to the contrary. God set his seal to their testimony by enabling them to do many and mighty miracles, to predict future events, and convert multitudes to the faith.—Upon hearing that the Gospel was preached all around, and not to themselves, the Jews might have thought that, for the greatness of their crimes,

they were passed by, and cast off. “Lest the poor house of Israel should think themselves abandoned to despair, the seed of Abraham, my ancient friend, unkind and cruel as they have been, make them the first offer of grace. Let them that struck the rock drink first of its refreshing streams, and let them that drew my blood be first welcome to its healing virtue.”—Their day of grace was likely to be the shortest. Begin at Jerusalem, for yet a little while and there will be no Jerusalem: yet forty years, and Jerusalem will be destroyed.—It was foretold that the Gospel should go forth from thence. (Isai. ii. 3, 4; Mic. iv. 2; Psal. cx. 2; Isai. xxviii. 16; xl. 9.) It was fit also that the Son of David, who was to “have the throne of his Father,” should begin his kingdom in that city, where David reigned. (2 Sam. v. 5, 9.)—The Apostles were to begin at Jerusalem, to furnish a standing example of the riches and freeness of the grace of Christ, in the offer of it to the vilest of sinners. If the murderers of Christ were not excepted from mercy, who need despair? — —

Figuratively; taking Jerusalem to mean God’s visible Church.

Preach first to my professing people. They have peculiar need of repentance and remission of sins, and these blessings are especially free and designed for them.—Here the Pharisees, the hypocrites, the formalists, and even the unbelieving Sadducees, are also to be sought for, and found, who peculiarly need to be called to repentance, and to seek pardon from God.—Here Christ was “wounded,” and even crucified afresh, “in the house of his friends;” here are those, who, like Peter, deny him, and as Judas, betray him; the many that forsake him, and flee in the time of danger and

suffering.—Here are the greatest light and advantages, and, therefore, sin rendered most inexcusable and aggravated, and the greatest degrees of guilt contracted. — — Here judgment as well as mercy, must begin; and the condemnation of the impenitent will be most severe. (Rom. i. 18; ii. 10; 1 Pet. iv. 17.) — —